

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Professional registration and the discursive construction of social work students' identities

### Thesis

#### How to cite:

Wiles, Frances (2011). Professional registration and the discursive construction of social work students' identities. EdD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2011 The Author

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:  
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.00007037>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

# **Professional registration and the discursive construction of social work students' identities**

**Frances Wiles**

BA (Hons) Social Administration, MA Social Sciences, Diploma in Applied Social Studies, Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Education (EdD)  
Centre for Research in Education and Ed Technology (CREET)  
The Open University

October, 2010

# **Professional registration and the discursive construction of social work students' identities**

## **Abstract**

My research is concerned with the development of social work students' personal and professional identities in the light of policy changes introduced into social work education. Since April 2005, social work students have had to register with the General Social Care Council and 'sign up to' the Codes of Practice. The Codes specify that social workers must not 'behave in a way, in work or outside work, which would call into question [their] suitability to work in social care services'. The research is of particular interest because the participants were among the first social work students to be registered; I hope that it will contribute to academic and professional debates.

The study is informed by a poststructuralist approach to identity and discourse. I argue that social work education and professional registration are part of a regulatory discourse. The research questions explore some of the discursive resources that social work students draw on to construct their personal and professional identities. I begin by locating the study within contemporary debates in higher and professional education, and then review the literature about social work registration and its implications for students and social work education. These policy and educational developments are considered through the lens of poststructuralist concepts: discourse, power and subject positions; governmentality and resistance. Finally, my literature review explores some concepts of identity and professional identity.

The empirical data is derived from seven semi-structured interviews with social work students. The transcripts were interrogated using a form of discourse analysis developed from the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987). The research findings suggest that this group of students see professional registration as an integral part of social work education and becoming qualified. Their talk indicates that registration brings students' private lives into a more public domain than previously. However, the data suggests that social work education itself challenges and de-stabilises identity as students negotiate the boundary between being 'unqualified' and 'professional'. So while registration does impact on how students behave and how they see themselves, this must be placed in the broader context of learning to be a professional social worker. The study concludes by considering the practical implications for social work education.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Dorothy Harris, my supervisor, for her support, guidance and enthusiasm. My thanks also to my long-suffering family and colleagues at work, for their kindness and understanding.

# Contents

## Abstract

## Acknowledgements

### Part 1: Introduction and literature review

<b>1</b>	<b>Introducing the context: social work education and professional registration</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1	Introduction	7
1.2	Social work: its place in higher education	8
1.3	A new regulatory role for social work educators	9
1.4	Implications for this study	11
1.5	A personal view through a discursive lens	13
1.6	Developing the research questions	14
1.7	Overview of the thesis	17
<b>2</b>	<b>Discourse and the regulatory context for social work education</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1	Introduction	18
2.2	Academic debates about registration: tensions and implications	18
2.3	Discourse: an illustration from adult education	22
2.4	Social work regulation as a discourse	25
2.5	Conflicting threads in the argumentative texture	28
2.6	Advantages and drawbacks of a discourse approach	34
2.7	Conclusions and implications for the research methodology	36
<b>3</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1	Introduction	38
3.2	Identities and higher education	38
3.3	Post-structuralist perspectives: subject positions, resistance and agency	40
3.4	Becoming a subject: discourse, technologies of the self and governmentality	43
3.5	Problems of agency and choice: a psychosocial rapprochement	47
3.6	Conclusion	49

<b>4</b>	<b>Professional identity</b>	<b>50</b>
4.1	Introduction	50
4.2	Meanings of professional identity	50
4.3	Identity work: becoming a social work professional	53
4.4	Negotiating professional identity through a community of practice	57
4.5	Learning the professional ‘use of self’	59
4.6	Conclusion	60

## **Part 2: Research process and methodology**

<b>5</b>	<b>Obtaining the data</b>	<b>63</b>
5.1	Introduction	63
5.2	Resolving ethical issues	63
5.3	Recruiting participants	65
5.4	Interviewing	67
5.5	Discussion and conclusion	70
<b>6</b>	<b>Research methodology (discourse analysis)</b>	<b>73</b>
6.1	Introduction	73
6.2	Selecting a relevant method of obtaining data	73
6.3	Finding an appropriate method of analysis	75
6.4	Analytical concepts used	79
6.5	Challenges of this method	90
6.6	Searching for patterns	93
6.7	Conclusion	94

## **Part 3: Analysis and interpretation of the data**

<b>7</b>	<b>Social work education: gains and challenges in students’ identity work</b>	<b>96</b>
7.1	Introduction	97
7.2	A note about transcription	97

7.3	Enrichment and challenge	98
7.4	Discussion	116
7.5	Conclusion	119
<b>8</b>	<b>Constructing the relationship between personal and professional identities</b>	
8.1	Introduction	121
8.2	Interpretative repertoires: constructing the boundary	121
8.3	Dealing with dilemmas	133
8.4	Discussion	140
8.5	Conclusion	143
<b>9</b>	<b>Professional registration: the impact on students' education, and on their personal and professional identities</b>	144
9.1	Introduction	144
9.2	Discursive power: constructing subject positions	145
9.3	Governmentality: 'it made me think more'	157
9.4	Resistance: 'I don't think the GSCC comes into it day to day'	165
9.5	Discussion	176
9.6	Conclusion	179
 <b>Part 4: Summary, evaluation and implications for professional practice in social work education</b>		
<b>10</b>	<b>Discussion, evaluation and conclusions</b>	181
10.1	Introduction	181
10.2	Overview of the analysis and findings	181
10.3	Evaluation	188
10.4	Implications for professional practice in social work education	193
10.5	A concluding postscript	196
 <b>References</b>		198

## **Appendices**

1	Pilot study: focus group – vignettes and summary of findings (2007/2008)	211
2	Summary of themes and discourses in Care Standards Tribunal decisions about registered social workers	215
3	Invitation letter and information sheet	223
4	Application to ethical panel	226
5	Brief biographical details of participants	231
6	Interview schedule (with prompts)	232
7	Consent form	234
8	Record Your Call information sheet (extract)	235
9	Interviews: summary of interpretative repertoires and recurring themes	236
10	Example of interview transcript ('Lynne')	239



## **Part 1**

### **Introduction and literature review**

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introducing the context: social work education and professional registration**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Social work education has changed considerably since 2003: the year it became a degree level subject. Two years later, it became a requirement for social work students to register with a UK care council before beginning their training. In registering, students agree to abide by the Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers<sup>1</sup> (General Social Care Council, 2002) which sets out standards of professional behaviour and practice; breaches can be reported to the care council. Of particular interest is code 5.8 (General Social Care Council, 2002) which specifies that ‘[as] a social care worker, you must uphold public trust and confidence in social care services’; and includes the injunction not to:

Behave in a way, in work or outside work, which would call into question your suitability to work in social care services.

Even before qualifying, students’ private lives are thus subject to scrutiny, along with their professional practice. The question which motivates this study is ‘what impact does this have on their personal and professional identities’?

This opening chapter establishes the context for the research, which takes place in England<sup>2</sup>. Like other ‘professional’ courses, social work education must meet the criteria of its regulatory body - the General Social Care Council (GSCC) - in addition to academic benchmarks: I will outline the implications of this for the research topic. A distinctive feature of the study is that it is informed by post-structuralist ideas about discourse and

---

<sup>1</sup> Referred to as the Codes of Practice in the rest of this report

<sup>2</sup> A similar framework of rules and procedures exists across the UK

identity. Introduced here, this highly relevant approach will be discussed in chapter 2. I conclude by clarifying the aims of this research, and its importance for professional practice in social work education. First, however, I locate social work education in the context of contemporary developments in the university sector.

## **1.2 Social work: its place in higher education**

Social work education is affected by the same trends and debates that impact on higher education generally. Of particular relevance are the expansion of the higher education sector; the drive to ‘widen participation’; and the implications for universities of offering professional courses.

The expansion of higher education has been characterised by a growth in vocational and professional qualifications (Usher et al., 1997; Bocock and Taylor, 2003). Traditional professional courses - law, medicine and architecture - have been joined by newer counterparts in nursing, teaching and social work (Preston-Shoot, 2004; Carr, 2009). In common with nurse education (Francis and Humphreys, 2002), social work has long aspired to become a ‘graduate profession’. The Social Work Degree replaced previous diploma and certificate level qualifications and, as Preston-Shoot (2004) argues, established a distinctive place for social work within higher education. This new academic status is reflected in the growing number of journals and annual conferences where both pedagogical and professional issues are debated and developed.

The government’s promotion of widening participation (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997), a means of achieving social inclusion, has contributed to the rising number of ‘non-traditional’ students who have entered university education in the

last decade (Reay, 1998). Social work courses play an important role in the inclusion agenda because, when compared with other courses, they recruit a higher proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and mature students with non-traditional educational backgrounds (GSCC, 2010). In chapter 2, I argue that this inclusiveness is threatened by the suitability criteria required by regulatory policies.

Like other professional curricula, social work courses are overseen by the regulatory body and have to meet employers' requirements as well as academic ones. Professional bodies may also influence selection policies in order to restrict access to the profession; this will be further explored in chapter 2. The Social Work Degree criteria are set out by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the GSCC. The curriculum incorporates occupational standards which are assessed during the two hundred days of 'practice learning'. It will be seen in chapters 7 - 9 that conceptualisations of professional identity, conveyed through the curriculum, are important for making sense of the empirical data.

This overview has argued that social work education is subject to the same tensions, debates and policy changes as the higher education sector in general. In addition, it must be understood in relation to professional registration. To contextualise the discussions that follow, I now outline the implications for individual students of registering with the GSCC, and the part played by universities.

### **1.3 A new regulatory role for social work educators**

Making judgements about whether people are personally suited for social work training is not new for social work educators. Course providers have always taken account of

applicants' personal histories, in addition to their academic and professional aptitude, as part of the selection process. Since 1989 they have been required to take account of students' criminal records in advance of offering a place (Perry, 2004). Although universities formally retain the discretion to select students for training, only the GSCC can legally determine whether a student is suitable to be admitted to their register; in theory, it is possible for a student to be accepted onto a course, only to be refused GSCC registration at a later date. Thus universities usually evaluate a student's personal suitability in relation to the GSCC's criteria of 'conduct', 'character' and 'health' (GSCC and Joint Universities Council Social Work Education Committee, 2007). As part of the university selection process, students provide detailed information about their past and present circumstances, including any physical or mental health conditions. They are not permitted to withhold information about offences which would otherwise be considered spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. In accordance with GSCC guidance, universities are expected to assess potential risks to people who use social work services, weighing up the seriousness and frequency of offences; the presence of mitigating circumstances; and whether the student has learned from their past behaviour (GSCC and Joint Universities Council Social Work Education Committee, 2007).

The introduction of the Social Work Degree and professional registration for students - and I will argue in chapter 2 that they are strategically linked - have thus placed social work educators in a regulatory role, and students under greater scrutiny.

#### **1.4 Implications for this study**

It is a significant change - and a driving force for this thesis - that registration<sup>3</sup> has brought students' private lives into a more public domain than previously. When I submitted my research proposal, professional registration had been in place for less than a year. There was little discussion or debate in the social work literature about the implications, beyond a concern with the administrative aspects. I had access to a group of students who were sponsored by their employers, and who were among the first cohort to be registered: this presents an exciting opportunity to explore the impact of this new policy.

Assessing students' suitability to be registered depends on the presentation of a particular kind of identity, largely through documentation (for example, 'self-disclosure' forms and records from the Criminal Records Bureau). And yet, as I explore in chapter 4, identity is a complex concept that cannot be captured by the registration process. Furness and Gilligan (2004:472) argue that 'many students ... have personal histories, ongoing experiences and/or (sic) impairments, which will inevitably have some indirect impact on their practice'. Difficult pasts may actually attract students to social work courses (Sellers and Hunter, 2005; Furness, 2007).

Nearly twenty per cent of all registration applicants declare a conduct or health issue (GSCC, 2008:9-10). Of these declarations, about seventy per cent relate to criminal convictions: although in practice, the majority are seen as 'low-risk offences, including motoring offences and speeding fines' (Ahmed, 2006:1). No separate figures are available for students applying to the register. However, research by Perry (2004) found that, on

---

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this report, I use the term 'registration' to refer to compulsory registration with the regulatory body (GSCC).

average, twenty-eight per cent of social work students of a Diploma in Social Work course (which pre-dated the requirement for student registration) admitted to having committed a criminal offence<sup>4</sup>, a figure which Perry considered to be an under-estimate. Putting this in context, statistics from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development indicate that a fifth of the general working population, and one in three men under thirty, has a criminal record (Madoc-Jones et al., 2007).

The factors contributing to ‘difficult pasts’ are not the focus of my study. The issue is that registration may put some students in the position where questions are raised about the very identities – forged through diverse cultural and life experiences – that have brought them into social work education. For example, Wray et al. (2005) found that students with hidden disabilities sometimes choose not to disclose them, for fear of being deemed ‘unsuitable’ for practice.

Summarising my argument so far, the first point is that registration has blurred the relationship between social work students’ private and working lives. This ‘subtle shift’ (Clark, 2006:86) in what is expected of professionals may be problematic for those with difficult pasts or even relatively minor offences. Moreover, might not any student, from any background, feel under scrutiny by the regulatory policy? As social work students’ private lives are now open to surveillance, it is relevant to explore the impact of registration on their professional and personal identities. This topic is best investigated by qualitative methods: my decision to start from a post-structuralist perspective emerged from the convergence of my professional and academic backgrounds.

---

<sup>4</sup> Perry’s data records the percentage of students who self-reported offences under different categories. These percentages range from 8% for ‘breaking and entering’ to 69% for traffic offences. My figure of 28% is calculated from amalgamating the different categories.

### **1.5 A personal view: through a discursive lens**

My postgraduate studies in social policy and social sciences coincided with a particular political era in the late 1990s: Blair's New Labour government; and a new personal era as I moved into management roles, initially in a social services training department and then in the new social work regulatory body. Having studied Social Administration<sup>5</sup> in the mid-1970s, I was excited and stimulated to discover the discursive or 'cultural turn' (Smith, 1998:231) that had subsequently taken place. By night I read academic critiques of New Labour's 'modernizing' agenda which drew on Foucault's post-structuralist ideas about discourse and power; by day I implemented the Blair government's training strategies and regulatory policies. At the regulatory body – in the period before registration for students was introduced – I sometimes reviewed written documentation from social work students who had been excluded from their courses on the grounds of alleged misconduct. As I read through these lengthy personal accounts, I caught glimpses of complex identities that were not easily reconciled with the requirements of the regulatory framework. Universities were expected to address 'unprofessional' behaviour, but there was no place in the procedures to either recognise or value the identity of someone who had struggled to overcome a long history of educational failure or family breakdown.

Clarke et al.'s (2000:16) critique of New Labour policies argues that we should

... move beyond the superficial representation of modernization as a rational and common sense programme designed to eradicate anachronistic practices in the management of public services. Rather, modernization is better understood as a

---

<sup>5</sup> Social Administration, as an academic subject, is now regarded as largely uncritical discipline that developed alongside the growth of the Welfare State, with 'significant connections to policy-makers ... and the civil service' (Clarke et al., 2000a:22).



discourse that seeks to harness the language and techniques of managerial reform to a new political agenda.

Up to this point I have given a 'rational and common sense' account of social work registration. However, my personal interest in the topic arises from perceiving registration in terms of discourse. This will be explored in chapter 2; put simply, discourses are powerful ways of presenting social phenomena as 'true' and making certain courses of action seem inevitable. The study of discourses springs from the notion that there is no single truth. Watson, (2000:75) argues that discourse research

... provides a different way into understanding social policies and their effects.

Further, once discourses are interrogated to see what assumptions are embedded within them, we can begin to see that what may appear as a benign or positive policy may also have complex and contradictory effects ... which may not be the ones desired in their initial formulation or intention.

My curiosity about the 'complex and contradictory effects' of professional registration - particularly for social work students - stimulates the research questions which guide this study.

## **1.6 Developing the research questions**

With hindsight, the 'story' of how my research focus has developed is not straightforward: this has much to do with the rapidly developing policy context. My appraisal of registration has had to take account of evolving responses - from practitioners and students, social work educators, and the regulatory body itself - to the new policy. GSCC registration for students was introduced in September 2005. During that academic year, in exploratory interviews and informal group discussions (conducted while studying a research methods course and developing my doctoral proposal), first level social work

students gave no indication that registration might have any implications for their personal lives. Coupled with the relative dearth of academic debate at that time, I was confronted with the possibility that the personal implications of registration had not yet become a relevant issue for exploration. I was interested to read Clark's (2006:87) assertion that the Codes of Practice marked a change in thinking 'in ways that have perhaps not been fully recognized'.

From 2006, however, practitioners were beginning to debate the implications of registration in the online discussion forum<sup>6</sup> of a weekly social work journal (*Community Care*, 2006). In response to the 'conduct' cases reported in the social work press, questions continue to be raised about individual social workers' privacy, and about the dividing line between misconduct and acceptable conduct. These debates, and the emergence of a more critical academic literature (for example, McLaughlin, 2007) have encouraged me to pursue my line of enquiry.

During my initial doctoral study, I conducted a focus group which suggested that not only were second level students aware of the implications of social work registration, but they viewed them as potentially contentious. Participants distinguished between private and professional life, and the study indicated that they found problematic the GSCC's right to look into people's past. Although limited by low attendance, the findings from this study (Appendix 1) are broadly consistent with the views expressed by qualified practitioners in the *Community Care* online discussion forum. Furthermore, similar concerns are reported in research by Curren and Atherton (2008) which explores the perceptions of university staff.

---

<sup>6</sup> The online forum is now known as 'Carespace'.

In addition to reviewing the academic literature, I have examined a number of official documents concerning the role and functions of the GSCC. On discovering the public website of the Care Standards Tribunal, I conducted a discourse analysis of twelve reports of appeals against regulatory decisions. This analysis alerted me to ambiguities in the regulatory policies, which will be discussed in chapter 2. The process of clarifying the research focus has been complex but worthwhile, and provides a firm foundation for the research questions.

My initial literature review and exploratory empirical work have confirmed that registration is a significant change for social work education. My professional experience, both past and present, leads me to question the implications for students, which are under-researched at present. My research aim, therefore, is to explore how professional registration affects the way that social work students talk about – and thus construct – their personal and professional identities. In line with the theoretical assumptions to be discussed in chapter 2, these ways of talking will be treated as discourses. The questions arising from this broad aim are:

1. What discourses do students draw on when talking about social work education?
2. What discourses do students draw on to describe themselves in private life and as developing professionals?
3. How do students talk about the personal consequences of their transition from 'lay person' to 'qualified social worker'?
4. What discourses do students draw on when talking about their experience of the regulatory process?

## **1.7 Overview of the thesis**

This report is in four parts. Chapters 2, 3 and 4, along with this introduction, review the literature to explore the educational and regulatory landscape from a Foucauldian discursive perspective, and investigate some contemporary ideas about identity and professional identity. Then, in chapters 5 and 6, I discuss the research process and the methodology. After that, the third part of the thesis presents different aspects of the data. In chapter 7, I look at the impact of social work education on students' identities. Chapter 8 explores how students construct the relationship between their professional and personal identities. In chapter 9, I consider the impact of social work registration on students' personal and professional identities. Finally, chapter 10 discusses the research findings, evaluates the methodology, and draws out some practical implications for social work education.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Discourse and the regulatory context for social work education**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

I have indicated that the new policy of professional registration has significant - and possibly unexpected - changes for social work education; and have shown how the research questions developed from this appraisal. This chapter has a twofold purpose: to review the academic literature about the implications of social work registration for students; and to introduce concepts that are central to the post-structuralist approach, in order to provide a framework for critique and analysis which will be drawn on throughout this thesis. I begin by reviewing emerging debates in the social work literature. I then discuss an example of how post-structuralist ideas have facilitated a critique of developments in the field of adult education. I go on to argue that discourse offers a relevant lens with which to understand social work registration and its effects for students. The post-structuralist approach is not without its critics, however; I consider some of its drawbacks, and conclude that the theory has advantages for investigating my research questions.

#### **2.2 Academic debates about registration: tensions and implications**

Until registration became compulsory in 2005, it received little attention in the academic community. The new Social Work Degree, on the other hand, stimulated lively debate (for example, Preston-Shoot, 2000; Higham et al., 2001); and in this context, the early literature on registration focused on its practical and administrative implications (for example Furness and Gilligan, 2004).

The focus of academic critique has now shifted to the process of making decisions about students' professional suitability. One concern is that, despite GSCC guidance, there are no common criteria for making judgements (Lafrance and Gray, 2004; Curren and Atherton, 2008). There exist, for example, different conceptualisations of 'risk' (Cowburn and Nelson, 2008). Given the complex and subjective nature of assessing students' suitability, it has been suggested that the decision is essentially an 'ethical' one (Curren and Atherton, 2008); which involves 'balancing the claims of the public to be protected against the claims of excluded groups for social justice' (Cowburn and Nelson, 2008:302). While no blueprint is - or can be - offered, it is argued that decisions should be based on transparent and clear principles.

An underlying theme is the importance of upholding professional values in the decision-making task. Cowburn and Nelson (2008:297) suggest that subjective assessments of risk may be influenced by students' 'class, gender, race, age, sexuality and disability'. This point is not developed in detail, but it is argued that students who are excluded from social work training by past criminal convictions may also face social exclusion in other areas of life. Citing research evidence of 'widespread discriminatory attitudes against ex-offenders by employers', Madoc-Jones et al. (2007:1390) support this point.

It is not only criminal convictions that raise questions about a person's suitability for social work education. The literature about student selection offers further insights into students who, for other reasons, may not easily meet the regulatory requirements described in chapter 1. Problems can be encountered by students with disabilities (Wray et al., 2005), and those who have been drawn into social work education by difficult personal histories: being in the care system, being carers for family members, or having experienced abuse

(Furness and Gilligan, 2004; Sellers and Hunter, 2005; Furness, 2007). Widening participation is not just a policy issue: Dillon (2007:839) argues that social work educators balance competing demands: 'to ... [promote] student diversity without compromising professional and academic standards, and whilst also endeavouring to uphold core social work values'. Life experiences can be viewed positively by admissions tutors, unless there are 'unresolved issues and difficulties' (Furness, 2007:249). I suggest that students with difficult family circumstances may also experience regulatory scrutiny: for example, they are required to tell the GSCC if their children have been involved with social services.

A relatively new consideration is how universities should deal with allegations of misconduct that arise during a student's training. Currer and Atherton (2008) and H. McLaughlin (2010) emphasise students' position as learners, suggesting that they cannot be expected to reach the high standards required of qualified social workers. H. McLaughlin (2010:93) cautions that '[in] seeking to promote public protection and professional accountability we are in danger of victimising student social workers.'

Since registration became compulsory, for qualified workers as well as students, a growing area of debate concerns its implications for private life. Clark (2006:87) argues that a social worker's 'moral character' is just as important as technical skills and professional principles; he welcomes the Codes of Practice but nevertheless suggests that they mark a change in thinking:

the new standards and processes of registration have ... sharpened the focus on character (as opposed to principle and duty) in ways that have perhaps not been fully recognized'.

Clark recognises that this change may have an impact on private life, and sees this as beneficial. He believes (2006:76) that ‘welfare professionals have to be personally committed to values and ways of life that extend well beyond the scope of their contract of employment’. While Clark acknowledges that the assessment of professional suitability could potentially open the door to prejudiced attitudes on the part of those who decide, there is no suggestion in his argument that the convergence of professional and private life might be contentious.

An alternative view is expressed by McLaughlin (2007), who argues that registration is a worrying development. Coining the term ‘the 24/7 social worker’, he asserts that clause 5.8 in the Codes of Practice (which cautions that behaviour outside work must not raise questions about professional suitability):

... clearly extends the employer’s control into areas hitherto considered outwith their remit. It also places the social worker under the scrutiny of colleagues, service users and members of the public, any of whom can report ‘unsuitable’ behaviour to the GSCC (McLaughlin, 2007:1269).

These contrasting perspectives reflect wider arguments about the nature of social work as a profession, and the extent to which social workers should be governed by professional ethics or the requirements of employers. Elements of this debate are taken up in chapter 4.

The literature about social work registration is inevitably recent and developing. Three emerging themes include: the importance of having transparent and ethical frameworks for making decisions; tensions between the GSCC criteria and the broader values of widening participation and social justice; and debates about what can reasonably be expected of a student social worker. It will be seen later that the second two, in particular, offer relevant



insights for interpreting my data. The earlier literature does not illuminate my initial impression that registration had brought social workers' private lives into greater scrutiny. However, the arguments of Clark (2006) and McLaughlin (2007) suggest that this issue is worthy of exploration. More recently, H. McLaughlin (2010:93) considers the regulatory criteria in relation to case studies and concludes that

It is clear that with registration and the implementation of the *Codes of Practice* ... social work students' lives are open to constant surveillance and challenge.

A limitation of the existing literature is that, on the whole, students' voices are missing. Where their views have been sought, it is with specific reference to student selection. My analysis of students' talk offers the opportunity to explore registration from an under-researched perspective. Furthermore, I contextualise registration by considering its implications for both professional and personal identity. The current literature suggests that registration involves tensions and contradictions: my decision to use discourse analysis helps to make these visible. I now draw on research from both education and social work to elucidate this conceptual framework.

### **2.3 Discourse: an illustration from adult education**

In its sociological and post-structuralist sense, the term 'discourse' is derived from the work of Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Foucault's work, although influential, is controversial and - according to its supporters - not always well understood (O'Farrell, 2005). Foucault argued that knowledge and meaning are constructed through discourse, a term which refers to 'identifiable collections of utterances ... which determine ... what may be said, by whom, in what context, and with what effect' (Gordon, 1994:xvi). Foucault was not only interested in the constitutive effects of language, however: he also

used the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘discursive practices’ to refer more widely to the construction of meaning through systems of knowledge and social practices (Hall, 2001:72-73). The post-structuralist approach has informed an extensive and respected body of educational thinking and research (for example, Maclure, 1993; Usher et al., 1997; Nicoll and Harrison, 2003; Chappell et al., 2003). To illustrate the benefits of applying discourse theory in the education context, I now discuss Edwards and Usher’s (1994) study of ‘competence’, chosen because their analysis is equally relevant for the social work curriculum, which follows a competency-based approach within an academic award (Higham et al., 2001).

Edwards and Usher (1994:2) do not set out to evaluate the pedagogical merits and drawbacks of a competency-based approach, but instead consider its effects as a discourse: ‘a set of discursive and material practices, which regulate and ‘form’ adults through a process of self-regulation’. They argue that within this approach, only certain kinds of workplace knowledge and understanding are defined as competence. This is demonstrated through an analysis of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) approach:

NVQs are broken down into units and elements of competence with their associated performance criteria and range statements. Each element has to be assessed to demonstrate a person is fully competent ... Thus ‘competence’ is not just a matter of performance, but of surveillance and control over the learner. Broader notions of assessment, of examinations and practical work, are refined into the practice of assessment of the smallest detail, in which each performance is clearly circumscribed by the performance criteria (Edwards and Usher, 1994:8).

Edwards and Usher's NVQ candidate methodically performs a series of prescribed behaviours in order to reach a 'true' state of competence. Here we see the effects of discursive power; for Foucault (1977, cited in Watson, 2000:68) power is not merely coercive, but intrinsically connected with knowledge and discourse. It operates, in a 'capillary' way, through every aspect of social life:

...power seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their position, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people.

Power is inherent in discourse: the NVQ candidate is regulated by the requirement to follow the rules. There is, as Edwards and Usher (1994:8) argue, 'no space for independence of thought or action along the way if one wishes to achieve competence and find a space in the workforce'. Indeed, they hold (1994:6) that certain knowledges - those arising outwith the workplace - are 'marginalised, silenced and repressed'.

Foucault argues that a discourse is expressed, and perpetuated by, 'rules of conduct, established texts and institutions' (Smith, 1998:254). In Edwards and Usher's example (1994:8), the inscription of the learner's performance as competent or not competent is incorporated into a 'vast bureaucratic web' of the NVQ assessment machinery 'which documents and charts their progress through the various elements and levels'. Furthermore, I suggest, the required competences are actually constructed in the act of being described in the assessment guidance.

An important feature of discourses is that they evolve and remain powerful by continually 'articulating' with other discourses. Edwards and Usher (1994:7) assert that the discourse

of competence is powerful precisely because of its articulation with other more 'progressive' education discourses:

Student-centred learning, negotiation of individual learning programmes, the accreditation of prior learning, the valuing of non-educational and training institutions as sites of learning, the need for guidance and counselling of learners; all of these now form an essential part of the discourse of competence.

When I interpret the discursive meanings in my research data, this notion of articulation will prove fruitful.

It is now possible to offer a summary of what discourse involves. Discourses (sometimes thought of in terms of discursive practices) construct 'truth', meaning and knowledges; for this reason, discourse is inseparable from power. Discourses express themselves through written texts and organisational structures. Discourses are continually evolving and interacting with each other. These ideas provide a useful way to understand the regulatory context in which social work students are learning to be professionals.

#### **2.4 Social work regulation as a discourse**

Foucault (1984:73) argues that discourses arise from particular historical circumstances: '[each] society has its regime of truth ... that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true'. Certainly, social work regulation, in England, could be seen as the product of a perceived crisis in social services in the late 1990s. Langan's (2000:158) analysis of the white paper *Modernizing Social Services* (Department of Health, 1998) argues that it constructed a discourse of failure and loss of trust in public services, which rendered social workers

highly receptive to new strategies ... commissions, councils and inspectorates, or national frameworks offering service models and national standards, the key innovations in the 'modernizing' proposals.

One of the strategies that Langan refers to is the Care Standards Act (2000), which introduced the Social Work Degree and professional registration; both being overseen and regulated by the GSCC, an organisation created by the same legislation.

More recent debates suggest that regulation is also associated with a current preoccupation with risk in society generally (McLaughlin, 2007; Madoc-Jones et al., 2007; Cowburn and Nelson, 2008). Regardless of the actual level of risk, McLaughlin (2007:1265) argues that moral panics 'invariably give rise to calls for increased regulation and state intervention to address the 'crisis' and alleviate public fears'. Statistical data (GSCC, 2008:10) supports this argument. Around eleven per cent of registration applications (by both qualified workers and students) are investigated because of serious concerns. Following investigation, however, only a minority of social workers are suspended or removed from the register. Thus a significant, and perhaps disproportionate, number of social workers and students face a lengthy period of uncertainty while their case is considered. Being reported to the care council can have distressing implications for students: placed under suspicion, they are likely to be suspended from their course until the issues are resolved. Thus, regardless of the outcome, the regulatory discourse does powerful work in marking the individual out as deviant, with damaging consequences.

Once constituted, the GSCC set about developing rules and policies to guide its work. Nicoll and Chappell (1998:41) argue that

Policy texts ... act discursively to produce “truth” and “knowledge” about higher education. They insert themselves authoritatively within discourses and present objects a priori within them. In the process, they conceal their “invention” of these objects and their part in the construction of the meanings attributed to them.

This process can be seen in the GSCC’s publication, early in its life, of the Codes of Practice which are used both to guide students’ practice and determine their suitability. Orme and Rennie (2006) observe that the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), a professional organisation, had already introduced a code of ethics in 1975, to provide guidance on professional standards. Wetherell (2001b:25) argues that ‘control over discourse is a vital source of power’: in this case it could be argued that producing the Codes of Practice was a symbolic action which both constructed new meaning and asserted the GSCC’s dominance as the arbiter of standards. Furthermore, once the new codes were in place, it became possible to introduce systems for registering the workforce and responding to breaches by registered workers. My analysis of the Conduct Rules (GSCC, 2003:6) provides an example of how the GSCC’s definition of ‘misconduct’ attempts to create meanings which reinforce the regulatory discourse:

Misconduct means conduct which calls into question the suitability of a Registrant to remain on the Register; [and] Register means the Register maintained under section 56 of the Act.

The strategic juxtaposition of the Social Work Degree and professional registration bring social work educators into the regulatory framework. Social work students (unlike nursing and medical students) must be registered with the regulatory body *before* their studies commence. Through the processes described in chapter 1, universities have to make

decisions not only about students' academic potential but also about their suitability to be entered on the GSCC register.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, like their counterparts in teaching and nursing (Brown et al., 2006; Yam, 2004) social work courses exercise a regulatory function in delivering the prescribed curriculum. On the other hand, universities are not equal partners in regulation: their compliance with GSCC requirements is continuously monitored, and serious departures can lead to the suspension and closure of programmes (Lombard, 2010). The curriculum itself is open to politically driven change, evidenced by the creation of a Social Work Taskforce to address the most recently documented failings of the profession and social work education.

In this section, I have argued that professional registration and the Social Work Degree are linked elements of a historically specific discourse of regulation. I suggest that the curriculum is thus influenced as much by the regulatory discourse as by educational ones; and that social work education occupies a (relatively) powerful position within the discourse. Professional registration itself, however, is subject to multiple and contradictory influences.

## **2.5 Conflicting threads in the argumentative texture**

I have argued that discourses always intersect and co-exist with other discourses. Drawing on Laclau (1993), Wetherell (2001b:25) depicts this process as 'an argumentative texture or a discursive fabric that brings together many different threads which can be combined and woven differently'. This can also be referred to as a 'discursive space' in which meanings are continually contested and evolve. How do these ideas contribute to an understanding of professional registration?

---

<sup>7</sup> This is not a legal requirement, but agencies who provide practice placements can only claim funding for students who are on the GSCC register.

Social work registration is not unique to the UK. My literature review suggests that (like social work itself) registration has to be understood in the context of each country's social conditions, welfare systems and wider governance (McDonald et al., 2003). In some countries - for example, Italy (Fargion, 2008) - registration is compulsory, whereas in others such as New Zealand, registration is on a voluntary basis (Orme and Rennie, 2006). There is no register in Australia, although the Australian Association of Social Workers encourages practitioners to adopt the values and principles of self-regulation (Kent, 2006). There are also differences between the meanings associated with social work registration. For example, in the USA, it is a mark of professional standing (Edwards et al., 2006) and in some states is available only to those with a master's level qualification (Strauss, 2008). Registered social workers in America are said to 'have greater autonomy and status' than in the UK (Bisman, 2004:110). On the other hand, in New Zealand, social work registration is framed primarily as a means to protect service users and the public, with no explicit intention to improve the status of the profession (Orme and Rennie, 2006). It is clear, then, that the meaning of professional registration depends on the dominant professional and cultural discourses prevailing in a particular society.

Within England, there is evidence to suggest that the 'argumentative texture' of registration is characterised by the contrasting discourses of 'professionalism' and 'control'. Introducing compulsory registration, Stephen Ladyman, then Community Care Minister, claimed that it would 'help to elevate the profession's status to the same level as that of doctors or lawyers' (Batty, 2004). The professionalism discourse, discussed in chapter 4, conveys powerful meanings: a regulated profession is associated with



trustworthiness and high standards. It has also been suggested that regulation conveys a mark of state approval on social work as a valuable occupation (McDonald et al., 2003).

On the other hand, the General Social Care Council's website adopts a 'control' discourse; it states its business to be 'setting standards of conduct and practice for social care workers [...] ... regulating the workforce, and ... regulating social work education and training' (GSCC, undated). Under the terms of the control discourse, social workers are seen as a potential threat to 'vulnerable' service users who need to be protected. From this perspective, registration can be interpreted as a challenge to professional integrity and autonomy, signalling that social workers are not to be trusted and require systems to control and regulate them (Banks, 2004; Ferguson, 2004). The tension between the discourses of professionalism and control will be considered again in chapter 9, which analyses student's talk about registration.

Another set of competing discourses can be seen in the workings of the Care Standards Tribunal (CST), which considers appeals against decisions made by the GSCC. Reports of GSCC decisions and CST appeals are regularly discussed in the social work press, and thus, I suggest, contribute to the discursive meanings to which students are exposed in the workplace. Detailed reports of the Tribunal's decisions can be found on its public website. My analysis of twelve CST decision reports revealed inconsistencies (Appendix 2). According to the GSCC (2008:18), the most commonly breached code is 5.8, which requires social workers to conduct themselves 'suitably' in private life. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the appeals heard by the CST involve instances where behaviour out of work has given cause for concern: criminal offences; health issues; behaviours such as drinking alcohol; personal and sexual relationships; and other personal difficulties.

I found variation between the reports, in terms of the decisions made and the rationale given. In one case, the Tribunal takes the view that social workers' misconduct cannot be overlooked because 'once doubt has been cast on how they are seen by others, the damage is done' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2006). In other reports, misconduct (criminal offences) did not result in the social workers' removal from the register (Care Standards Tribunal, 2007; 2008b). Particularly surprising - given the GSCC's guidance (2002: code 5.4) that social care workers must not '[form] inappropriate personal relationships with service users' - is that two social workers had developed relationships with adult service users, and yet were not judged to be professionally unsuitable (Care Standards Tribunal, 2008a; 2008b). Misconduct, therefore, does not always lead the Tribunal panel to conclude that a social worker is unsuitable. Variation may arise because membership of Tribunal panels changes between cases (Pearl, 2008). However, another possibility is that it reflects competing discourses and perspectives at play in the Tribunal's work.

Where proven misconduct does not lead to sanction, it appears that 'risk' is balanced against the social worker's capacity for change: the Tribunal takes account of mitigating factors such as expressions of remorse, evidence of an otherwise 'good character' and their own judgement that no risk is posed to the public. In another case, the panel weighs up a social worker's right to a private life against the 'public interest'. It concludes that, in becoming registered, social workers bring their private life into contact with their public life, and therefore:

any 'right' to an unrestricted social life must give way to the wider public interest in ensuring that professionals do not present a risk to service users (Care Standards Tribunal, 2008a:13).

These comments reinforce the argument that registration requires social workers' private lives to be available for scrutiny. Thus it appears that, as Clark (2006) suggests, the private and professional lives of social workers cannot be separated.

The findings from my examination of CST reports accord with K. McLaughlin's (2010) analysis, which draws attention to the inconsistencies in CST judgements. He argues that these reflect a lack of clarity and transparency in how the GSCC requirements are to be interpreted. My own concern, however, is not so much to evaluate the regulatory requirements but rather to explore what the inconsistencies suggest about competing discourses inherent in professional registration.

Earlier in this chapter I discussed the idea that discourses rely on being continually reproduced, through texts and practices, to remain powerful. However, Foucault (1994a:324) argues that '[t]here is no power without potential refusal or revolt' because discourses and power always contain the seeds of resistance. This goes hand in hand with the fluid nature of discourse: just as meanings are produced through discourse, they can also be subverted and changed. Resistance can take many forms. The more subtle and personal expressions of resistance will be discussed further in chapter 3. Another kind of resistance is expressed through collective actions and debates. For example, some social work academics and practitioners have resisted the trend towards 'professionalisation', arguing that its elitist connotations set up barriers between practitioners and service users (Payne, 2002).

The mechanism for appeals against GSCC decisions provides an opportunity for individuals to challenge the regulatory discourse, albeit within institutionalised parameters. Perhaps equally significant, however, are practitioners' online debates (Community Care, 2006), in response to press reports about GSCC decisions and CST appeals. These forums provide the space for resistance to be expressed: as discussed in chapter 1, debates typically raise questions about the definition of misconduct, and the privacy of individual workers. More recently, a survey by *Community Care* (Hayes, 2008) found that only fifty-three per cent of respondents agreed that social workers' private lives should be subject to care councils' conduct processes; a quarter disagreed, and fifteen per cent were undecided. Practitioner debates - reflecting a mixture of views, both compliant and resistant - indicate the range of discourses which circulate in students' workplaces and practice learning placements, and thus provide a resource for understanding talk about registration.

Reviewing this section, the evidence supports the idea that professional registration can be seen as a 'discursive space' in which meanings are continually contested. The meanings are contingent on differing professional, cultural and workplace contexts; and on conflicting ideas about professionalism versus control, risk versus rights, and even about human nature. The notion of contested meanings provides a resource for analysing students' talk, particularly in relation to the discussion of personal and professional life in chapter 8. In chapter 9, the concept of resistance provides a way to interpret data that appears initially puzzling. I have indicated that certain discursive meanings emerge from an analysis of academic and policy texts; I now want to consider the advantages - and some drawbacks - of using discourse analysis as a research method.

## **2.6 Advantages and drawbacks of a discourse approach**

Post-structuralist theories provide an established conceptual framework for educational research; for example, in this chapter I have drawn on Edwards and Usher's extensive work on adult learning. In particular, chapters 3 and 4 discuss some of the educational research which builds on ideas about discourse and identity. The approach is not a dominant one, however, and can arouse contention.

The notion that discourse is constitutive has profound epistemological implications in relation to the concepts of truth and reality. Foucault (1984:60) is concerned with 'how effects of truth are produced within discourses'; but argues that the discourses themselves 'are neither true nor false'. In discourse research, as Wetherell (2001b:16) explains:

decisions about the truth and falsity of descriptions are typically suspended. Discourse analysts are much more interested in studying the process of construction itself, how 'truths' emerge, how social realities and identities are built and the consequences of these, than working out what 'really happened'.

For example, Edwards and Usher do not evaluate the notion of competence but, rather, are concerned to explore its different meanings. However, the rejection of 'truth' does not, at first sight, sit easily with the 'ethic of improvement' which Peim (2009:241) suggests 'dominates much contemporary educational research thinking'. He argues that this principle acts as a constraint on education research projects, because research which does not directly lead to improvement can be 'cast as irrelevant or frivolously self-indulgent'. The notion of a contingent reality is equally problematic in social work research. Evaluating research methods, Fawcett (1998:265) observes that:

Poststructuralist and postmodern orientations have been regarded as pretentious and elitist, and attention has been drawn to how such terms can be used to support almost anything.

Accusations of relativism arise from the assumption that post-structuralist researchers are not interested in discovering 'truth' or 'how things really are'. This is a misconception: it is not that discourse researchers dismiss the possibility of the real, but they consider that research offers only a partial version of reality, which is situated in particular contexts, including the researcher's own values and position (Taylor, 2001a). This perspective arises from seeing the social world as too complex and dynamic for all factors to be taken into account in any given situation. Furthermore, to claim a single truth would be to deny the multiple viewpoints and perspectives of those involved.

An important advantage of post-structuralist discourse analysis is its capacity to examine the effects of power relations revealed in social interaction (Wetherell, 2001c). At the wider level, as Nicoll and Chappell (1998) argue in their discussion of education policies, a discourse approach facilitates a more critical appraisal of the different influences and interests involved. Without this questioning stance, Peim (2009:241) suggests that education research risks 'failing to see beyond the horizons of ... limited perspectives'. Professional registration, as I have shown, is fraught with contention and difficulty for social work students. An approach which can take account of contradictions and power relationships should provide useful insight into this relatively under-researched topic.

Foucault's extensive body of writings has stimulated a variety of discourse theory and research methods, in fields of study including sociology, social policy, education and psychology. In the 1980s, psychologists such as Billig, Potter and Wetherell began to

develop forms of discourse analysis - discursive psychology - which draw on Foucauldian theory to re-think the study of 'minds, selves and sense-making' (Wetherell, 2001b:27). Although I approach my research topic from the perspective of education and social work, these analytic methods have formed a rich ground for developing my own study.

## **2.7 Conclusion and implications for the research methodology**

In this chapter I introduced some key theoretical concepts used in discourse research, and showed how they can be used to critically explore developments in education. I argued that social work education and professional registration have developed in tandem within a broader regulatory framework, and drew on post-structuralist ideas to make sense of these developments. My literature review suggests that professional registration carries with it a range of meanings which I have presented in terms of discourse. In the UK, regulation is bound up with two separate and explicit discourses: to control the workforce (and thus protect service users and the public), and to raise the status of the profession. These potentially contradictory meanings are evident in the texts and debates which social work students are exposed to.

My literature review confirms that academic debates are engaging, more and more, with the implications of professional registration for social work students. There is concern that some groups of students may be excluded from, or disadvantaged in, social work education due their personal histories. Furthermore, when making decisions about whether students are eligible to enter and remain in social work education, it has been argued that the subjective nature of 'suitability' presents real difficulties. It is also suggested that a general preoccupation with 'risk' leads to a situation where students' studies may be interrupted.

Despite some difficulties with the post-structuralist approach, I consider that its capacity to expose the complex and powerful meanings embedded in everyday practices has distinct advantages for exploring the implications of professional registration. An important point to emerge from the literature review is that professional registration has brought private and professional life closer together, and, furthermore, that both are now open to scrutiny. In the next chapter I explore the concept of identity and professional identity, viewing the education and social work literature through the lens of post-structuralist theory.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Identity**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

My research questions are concerned with students' changing sense of themselves; particularly the impact of professional registration on the interplay between professional and personal identities. Here I explore the concept of identity, insofar as it relates to these questions; turning to consider particular meanings associated with professional identity in chapter 4. I draw on the extensive education literature which investigates identity from a post-structuralist perspective. Towards the end of the chapter I review recent attempts to combine Foucault's ideas with contemporary psychoanalytic theory.

#### **3.2 Identities and higher education**

Higher education is intrinsically linked with identity construction. There is a body of post-structuralist writing which argues that educational programmes - intentionally or not - involve a degree of self-transformation (Chappell et al., 2003; Usher et al., 1997; Brown et al. 2006). Examples include: corporate training courses aimed at producing a particular kind of employee (Chappell et al., 2003); health education programmes (Tennant, 2009) and professional courses such as medicine and teaching (Kaiser 2002; Soreide, 2007). Nicoll and Harrison (2003:24) suggest that work-based education '[aligns] the practices, values and attitudes of the worker with those of a profession and the goals and missions of the organisation'. Regardless of their stated aims, therefore, educational programmes can have unintended and complex consequences for identity. These can be explored through the research literature about 'non-traditional' students entering higher education; these studies are relevant for social work education which, as we have seen, attracts an unusually diverse intake.

Research studies by Reay (1998; 2003) and Reay et al. (2010) highlight the shift - and loss - of identity that occurs when students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds experience dissonance between the culture and values of their families and those of the higher education setting. Lucey et al. (2003:295) suggest that, for working-class young women, going to university involves

a 'dis-identification with one's parents and family [which] can engender a deep sense of shame ... [For] able working-class girls who do well at school, what is so clearly at stake is the loss of identity.

Research into the experiences of mature women students, entering higher education for the first time, suggests that they find it difficult to reconcile the role of student and learner with their family identities (Johnson and Robson, 1999). Similar findings emerge from Kevern and Webb's (2004) study of mature women undertaking nurse education, which reports the negative consequences for students' personal relationships. Even mature postgraduate students (Nel, 2006) describe family therapy training as overwhelming and de-skilling, leading them to re-evaluate their personal and professional identities. These accounts offer valuable perspectives for my own study, especially as the participants shared similar age and educational backgrounds to students on the Social Work Programme. The studies also suggest different theoretical approaches for exploring the processes by which identities may be undermined or challenged by higher education. Nel, and Johnson and Robson, use a phenomenological methodology which does not, on the whole, take account of the wider social context. More useful for my study is the analytical perspective taken by Kevern and Webb, who place their findings within an ideological context; this enables them to consider ways in which the structure of university programmes may deter women with family commitments. Of particular interest is Lucey et al.'s adoption of a 'psychoanalytically

informed post-structuralism' (2003:289) which combines perspectives with very different provenances. Both are potentially relevant for my research topic.

### **3.3 Post-structuralist perspectives: subject positions, resistance and agency**

There is a significant distinction between psychoanalytic and post-structuralist conceptualisations of identity and subjectivity, which relates, I suggest, to 'the unconscious'. The unconscious is, in various representations, the key concept underpinning all schools of psychoanalysis; the workings of the unconscious are what produces people's behaviour and identities (Burkitt, 1991). The post-structuralist account, on the other hand, assigns no place to the unconscious. Some post-structuralist writers find this unsatisfactory, resulting in a 'rapprochement' with psychoanalytic thinking led by key theorists such as Hall (1996), Hollway (1984) and Butler (1993, discussed by Hall, 1996). Despite its shortcomings, the post-structuralist approach has, nevertheless, gained ground in education research and writing (Usher et al., 1997; Tennant, 2009) and to some extent in social work (Gilbert, 2005; Reynolds, 2007; H. McLaughlin, 2010).

Post-structuralist identity is constructed in relation to discourse and discursive practices; and in the same way that discourses are fluid, changing and multiple, so too is identity. It is not the humanistic, stable 'inner core' of someone, but a self which is 'never unified ... never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses ... constantly in the process of change and transformation' (Hall 1996:4). Thus people occupy a range of identities, constructed in different contexts and relationships. Furthermore, as Usher et al. (1997:104) write, '[s]ubjectivity is always shifting and uncertain and has to be continually 're-formed''. An alternative argument, still in the post-structuralist tradition, draws on the work of theorists such as Gergen and Gergen

(1988) to propose a ‘narrative identity’ (Chappell et al., 2003:50), through which the individual selectively incorporates their multiple identities, and disparate events, into a personal story of continuity and change over time. The authors emphasise that such coherence is illusory; nevertheless this concept provides a convincing explanation for the sense of continuity that we sometimes experience when thinking of, and talking about, ourselves.

In post-structuralist writing, identities are often discussed in terms of subject positions. Each discourse creates its own ‘subjects’: that is, the people who occupy particular categories and positions which are ‘made available’ by the discourse. For example, in the field of special education, Rose (1985, cited in Taylor, 2001a:9) has argued that ‘as schooling became widespread in Britain ... the requirements of the new education system created new categories of children, such as the ‘feeble-minded’ child who had no obvious physical problem yet did not learn or progress through the school system’. Subject positions are not just descriptions, however, but are bound up with power relationships. A discourse confers power on some people to define the status of others. Clark (2006:87) has pointed out that social work registration is ‘a process of identifying and certifying suitable *persons* to be employed as professionals, while barring others’. The discourse of regulation has, I suggest, created the new category of ‘registered social worker’, a subject position which confers both approval and obligations.

A subject produced within discourse initially appears to leave no opportunity for agency; for this reason, subjectivity needs to be viewed in the light of resistance. In the previous chapter I introduced the idea that the temporary and fluid nature of discourse creates opportunities for discursive meanings to be subverted and re-defined. In discourse analysis

studies, the subtleties of resistance provide a way to theorise people's attempts to interpret and challenge culturally sanctioned ideas and norms. Sometimes these struggles are collective ones. Youdell (2006:39) cites the example of '[g]ay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender politics' reinscription of "queer" [and] disability studies' reinscription of "crip" to reclaim a positive identity. Resistance can also be expressed at a more private level. In her interviews with teachers, Maclure (1993:318) found that a 'surprisingly high proportion ... wanted to deny at least part of the identity of 'teacher''. Some teachers, therefore, adopted a 'subversive identity' by claiming 'a mischievous past' (1993:319). Maclure (although not explicitly drawing on Foucault) suggests that teachers are struggling with a 'crisis of identity and career' (1993:320) in which professional identities - based on 'the old iconographies of teacherhood, with their virtues of vocation, care, dedication' - conflicted with 'new professional identities which emphasise deeds and conduct outside as well as inside the classroom: the ... self-actualising ... extended professional' (1993:319-320).

While some challenges to discourse are overt, resistance can be very subtle. An illuminating example comes from Christensen et al.'s (1997) study of women who marry into farming families. This takes a life course perspective, rather than an explicitly post-structuralist one; exploring the cultural strategies which younger wives draw on to deal with the constraints and loneliness of their social and family life. The researchers argue that their responses - 'stoic acceptance' - are based on the women's recognition that, in later life, they will come to achieve status in the family enterprise. This expectation enables them to find meaning in the present (despite adversity), and to adopt a strategy of 'flexible responsiveness', looking for small areas of family life where they can have influence. Christensen et al.'s interpretation could be contested, but I feel it powerfully illustrates the

idea that people's actions may look like acquiescence until closer analysis reveals a degree of negotiation, agency, and even subversion. This supports Foucault's (1977) view that discourses, power and resistance operate in the micro-politics of everyday life (Watson, 2000). Chapter 6 discusses ways in which the concept of resistance informs the method of discourse analysis; in my research, this concept sensitised me to the possibility that social work students may adopt strategies - not always obvious - to deal with powerful, and potentially restrictive, discourses.

To recap, then, discourses are not necessarily, or always, constraining: discursive power can be productive. Foucault puts forward the idea that people - subjects - can exercise choice. Indeed, he asserts (1994b:342) that:

[power] 'is exercised only over free subjects ... individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available'.

So people are not only the *subjects* of discourse; they actively construct their identities in relation to it. Opportunities for doing this may depend on individuals' circumstances, and the extent to which they are able to exercise power in relation to dominant discourses. I now go on to discuss some of the ways in which people can be considered to actively construct identity.

### **3.4 Becoming a subject: discourse, technologies of the self and governmentality**

Foucault (1983, in Chappell et al., 2003:12) used the word 'subject' in two senses: 'subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge'. These nuances are reflected in Foucault's suggestion (1994b:326-327) that there are three interlinked ways - 'modes of objectification' - which 'transform human

beings into subjects'. The first mode, as we have seen, is through discourse; where people are fixed in a subject position by, or construct a position in relation to, discourse. Gilbert (2005) draws on this concept to show how managers of care services took up subject positions in relation, and sometimes in opposition, to discourses of professionalism, trust and managerialism. Similarly, Chappell et al. (2003) claim that while a narrative identity appears unique to its author, it is constructed through incorporating shared cultural and discursive meanings; this limits the range of identities that can be negotiated.

Foucault's second mode of objectification (1994b:326-327) is that, through 'dividing practices', an individual is categorised according to certain rules and norms, becoming 'divided inside himself or divided by others'. This resonates with Derrida's suggestion (cited in Hall, 1996) that we construct boundaries and notions of 'otherness' to create our own sense of identity. In Reynolds' study (2007:13), participants constructed and maintained their professional identities by aligning themselves with particular categories: for example, 'the timely and effective nurses ... contrasted with overstretched social workers'. Recalling Rose (1985), the categorisation of some children as able to learn, and others as 'learning disabled' illustrates the operation of dividing practices within education discourse.

The third mode of objectification (Foucault, 1994b:326-327) is 'the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject'. This active work by the individual is analysed by Foucault (Martin, 1988:online) through the concept of 'technologies of the self': that is, 'how an individual acts upon himself'. It includes all the actions people take to transform themselves into one kind of person or another. Foucault was particularly interested in social practices such as writing journals and letters which record the writer's thoughts and

the practical details of everyday life; paying attention to one's bodily and mental states; self-reflection; 'the examination of conscience at the end of the day' (Martin, 1988: online); as well as 'confession' in religious and other areas of life. Modern examples include writing reflective accounts for professional development or therapeutic goals; or signing up for adult education classes.

Foucault (Martin, 1988: online) argues that these technologies 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'. Usher et al. (1997), and Chappell et al. (2003), consider technologies of the self in relation to education practices and developments in adult education. It can be argued that social work students are continually engaged in technologies of the self, marshalling their previous work and life experiences to construct a particular version of themselves: in their applications for social work training and to the GSCC register. We can also see this concept in the longstanding tradition, in social work education, of students writing detailed records about their practice ('process recordings') for the purpose of both self-reflection and assessment. Taylor (2006:202) argues that reflective accounts play an important role in the construction of professional identity, because they '[make] the practice of social work visible in a particular way for a particular audience'.

The idea of the self as something which is constructed and maintained through discursive practices is not confined to post-structuralist thinking; there are similarities with the ideas of G.H. Mead, for example (Burkitt, 1991). A distinguishing feature of post-structuralist work, though, is that the construction of subjectivity takes place within the complex system



of power relations permeating all aspects of life. The construction of subject positions - even when this appears to involve a high degree of agency - is linked (although not always explicitly) with wider discourses which operate at a 'macro' level. The government's emphasis on lifelong learning, in the late 1990s (Tight, 1998), shows how the personal goals of the 'self-directed learner' are harnessed to the wider needs of the economy.

By means of their association with discourses and power, technologies of the self are related to Foucault's concept of governmentality. Governmentality refers to practices in which 'people are educated to govern themselves through bringing their inner lives into the domain of power' (Usher et al., 1997:113). Nicoll and Harrison (2003:25), adopting a Foucauldian analysis, argue that learning outcomes and similar prescriptions work as a 'normative and normalising mechanism ... to stabilise what is understood and practised as good teaching'. In social work education, students are required to learn professional accountability according to the Codes of Practice, which includes being responsible for one's own development and conduct. Governmentality thus involves 'people investing their identity, subjectivity and desires with those ascribed to them through ... discourses' (Usher et al., 1997:113); in this case through students taking on professional identities as social workers. A further example of governmentality is that once accepted for social work education and registered with the GSCC, social work students have a continuing responsibility to abide by the Codes of Practice throughout their training; this includes notifying the GSCC of any change of circumstances that might affect their suitability.

In this section, I have considered some key ideas in post-structuralist thinking which attempt to explain how people come to occupy particular identities. While I have argued that people are constructed and positioned by discourse as subjects, I have shown that

Foucault's theory allows for greater agency than might initially be suggested. Nevertheless, it will be useful at this point to acknowledge some of the criticisms of post-structuralism with regard to identity.

### **3.5 Problems of agency and choice: a psychosocial rapprochement?**

A critique of post-structuralist ideas is that they render people's agency and power subservient to discourses. Rorty (cited in Smith 1998:296), for example, suggests that Foucault's theories 'produce 'subjects' in such a way as to transform people into docile bodies and leave them in a position of powerlessness'. O'Farrell (2005) acknowledges that Foucault's conceptualisation of subjectivity was not always clear in his earlier work, which focuses on the constraining effects of 'discourse'. Foucault's later work (1994b), on the other hand, suggests that the inherent instability within discourses creates opportunities for people to negotiate, resist and subvert meanings. In these writings, as I have already discussed, Foucault is concerned not only with resistance, but also with how people actively work to produce a 'self' or 'subject' (O'Farrell, 2005). Even so, reviewing the literature it is clear that questions of agency and choice continue to present a challenge for post-structuralist writers (Hall, 1996; Wetherell, 2003).

Given the pervasiveness of discourse, what makes two people from similar circumstances (that is, with similar opportunities to exercise power) gravitate towards different subject positions within a discourse? In psychoanalytic theory, the unconscious is the source of all our motivations: it is what pushes us to pursue some courses of action and reject others. This accounts for why people deal with circumstances differently (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005). Foucault takes a negative view of psychoanalytic theory; but he does not offer an alternative explanation to this question (Hall, 1996:12). Before concluding, I want to

acknowledge some recent developments which have attempted to bring discourse and psychoanalytic theory closer together.

Hall (1996:13) observes that in Foucault's later work he appears to acknowledge 'the existence of some interior landscape of the subject ... demonstrated in the practices of self-production'. Hall (1996:14) speculates that, before his death, Foucault may have been moving towards an explanation of why people are drawn to take up certain subject positions rather than others; on the other hand, he suggests that while psychoanalysis would have been a fruitful source of thinking, Foucault would have been 'prevented from moving in that direction by his own critique of it as simply another network of disciplinary power relations'. This has not prevented current discourse theorists from developing Foucault's theories by seeking further inspiration in psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Jacques Lacan.

I find Hollway and Jefferson's 'psychosocial' approach (2000; 2005) especially compelling, showing how elements can be taken from both discourse and psychoanalytic theory. In her research on gender differences, Hollway (1984:256) identifies discourses which make gendered subject positions available, but she also draws on psychoanalytic theory to argue that people's individual histories produce 'subjectivity', and an individualised 'investment' in taking up certain discourse positions rather than others. In her work with Tony Jefferson, Hollway (2005:149) uses the term 'investment' to mean the reward for a particular individual, which is not necessarily a 'choice' in the sense of being a rational decision, and which 'leaves space for the influence of the ... unconscious'. This approach is attractive in a theoretical sense, and it would have offered some useful insights for my research: for example, the idea that people 'invest' their personal identities in

training to become social workers seems convincing. However, as I discuss in chapter 6, I have taken the view that the benefits of a psychosocial approach are outweighed by the ethical difficulties of using it as a research method.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

I have outlined the post-structuralist approach to identity, in order to draw on it later, when analysing the data. The key point, here, is to establish the concept of identity, not as the 'core of someone', but a fluid concept in which people can simultaneously adopt multiple and constantly changing subject positions within discourses. I have introduced the idea of a narrative identity, which bestows a sense of coherence (albeit illusory) for the subject. People are positioned by - and position themselves within - discourse. To a varying degree, people are active in constructing their own identities: utilising the resources of a discourse, and engaging in technologies of the self. The co-existence of multiple discourses makes it possible for negotiation and resistance. Resistance can be very subtle, but it offers a strategy for people to contend with difficult, possibly oppressive, circumstances. On the other hand, the concept of governmentality highlights the way that people are educated to 'govern themselves': bringing their 'inner lives' within the realm of discursive power. I have touched, in this chapter, on the identities that people adopt in the workplace; next, I extend the discussion to explore the meaning of 'professional identity'.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Professional identity**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

An objective of social work education, evident in the curriculum requirements, is to facilitate the development of professional identity. I understand a person's professional identity to be one of multiple subjectivities, shaped by educational practices and discursive meanings. What kind of meanings are these, however? The extensive literature on professional identity reveals several ways of conceptualising this term. This chapter explores the cultural understandings that social work students draw on as discursive resources.

#### **4.2 Meanings of 'professional identity'**

Sociological definitions of the desired professional 'traits' (Hextall et al., 2007) have, I suggest, influenced debates about social work identity. Yam (2004:929) summarises the traits thus: an 'extensive theoretical knowledge base'; 'expertise in a specialized field'; an 'altruistic commitment to service'; an 'unusual degree of autonomy in work'; 'a code of ethics and conduct overseen by a body of representatives from within the field itself'; and 'a personal identity that stems from the professional's occupation'. From a post-structuralist perspective, the notion of traits helps to legitimise a discourse of professionalism, in which, by virtue of certain bodies of knowledge and competence, some people are positioned as experts.

It is evident that the policies designed to raise the status of social work - both registration and the Social Work Degree - draw, to a large extent, on the professionalism discourse.

The curriculum incorporates the National Occupational Standards (NOS) (Topss, 2002:55-63), which prescribe 'performance criteria' for 'professional competence in social work practice'. Although the term 'professional' is not defined, the possession of certain traits are inferred. For example, social workers must draw on theoretical and other knowledge, and demonstrate expertise in researching and critically analysing 'best social work practice'. It could be argued that the discourse of professionalism has been selectively utilised in the curriculum. Burt and Worsley (2008:39) suggest that 'individual autonomy has never been a particular feature of mainstream social work practice because it has developed almost exclusively within the public sector', which limits the level of discretion available to the practitioner. The relative absence of autonomy led Etzioni (cited in Burt and Worsley, 2008:29) to argue that occupational groups such as teachers, social workers and nurses are more appropriately described as 'semi-professions'. Nevertheless, the NOS (Topss, 2002:57) suggest that a degree of autonomous judgement, along with a commitment to professional ethics, is required in order to '[u]se professional assertiveness to justify decisions and uphold professional ... values' and 'manage complex ethical issues, dilemmas and conflicts'. As professionals, social workers are also required to 'ensure [their] own professional development' (Topss, 2002:57).

The nature of social work professional identity, and the question of whether social work is a profession at all, has long been debated in academic and professional journals. These debates, to varying degrees, utilise the discursive meanings of professionalism, including some notion of traits. One usage of the term 'professional identity' is to forge a collective sense of 'what it means to be a social worker' (Witkin, 1999:293). Sometimes, however, the term is used almost interchangeably with 'social worker', to refer unproblematically to an occupational category (for example, McMichael, 2000; Preston-Shoot, 2004; Quinney

et al., 2008). Other accounts propose particular characteristics and beliefs that distinguish the social work profession: its specialist knowledge base, value system, and capacity for exercising autonomy and judgement. When claiming social work's uniqueness, however, authors favour different knowledges and values. O'Neill (1999), for example, holds that the profession's identity is threatened by abandoning psychoanalytic practice models; whereas Schneider and Netting (1999) suggest that the profession is characterised by its commitment, enshrined in the American professional code, to influence social policies through political action. Witkin (1999:293) concludes that social work identity 'is never stable and is always being negotiated'; and for this reason, he argues, its common values, principles and aims - rather than its specialist ones - offer the strongest basis for a collective professional identity. These arguments, briefly touched on here, provide a sense of the rich breadth of shared discursive resources available for constructing professional identities; they do not, however, explain how people actually go about this. Another discursive resource, and a second approach to professional identity, has been stimulated by the trend towards multi-agency working. Dutton and Worsley (2009:151) suggest that '[t]he shifting nature of health and social care ... encourages a view that professional identity is more fluid and perhaps fragmented than ever before ... [particularly within] the context of multi-disciplinary settings'. A particular theme arising from research is that social workers perceive their professional identity being undermined in these contexts (Barnes et al., 2000; Moran et al., 2006). These are valuable discussions in their own right, but again, do not usually offer a perspective on identity construction.

So far, then, I argue that the professionalism discourse influences the way that professional identity is written and talked about; and that these meanings offer students resources for developing a sense of being a social worker. My research questions are concerned with the

interplay between professional and personal identity; in this respect, the final trait noted by Yam (2004:929) - 'a personal identity that stems from the professional's occupation' - is especially pertinent. This idea may have prompted Greenwood, writing about social work in 1957, to observe that 'the professional is a person whose work becomes his life' (cited by Burt and Worsley, 2008:28). A third approach to professional identity explores subjective experiences of how social workers and students come to 'identify themselves' with the profession.

### **4.3 Identity work: becoming a social work professional**

In considering the research on 'professional identity work', I find it fruitful to include examples from the broader education literature about students of teaching and medicine. Of particular relevance for my research questions are studies which examine, from a post-structuralist perspective, how professionals construct their identities in relation to policy discourses.

Analysing curriculum statements about competence, Nicoll and Harrison (2003:33) argue that a post-structuralist approach exposes the 'working of power through discourse', revealing how such documents designate what constitutes 'good' and 'professional' teaching. In a similar way, Soreide (2007) combines post-structural theories about discourse and narrative identity, to analyse official documents which specify the content of the school curriculum. She argues (2007:130-132) that these policies act as 'public narratives' which define what teaching is; how teachers 'should think about themselves as teachers, thus their teacher identities'; and how they 'experience and carry out their jobs'. In social work, the degree curriculum, and the standards and principles conveyed by the Codes of Practice, are examples of such public narratives. Others include documents such



as the Social Work Taskforce report (2009:15), which defines ‘what social work should be: a profession made up of highly skilled, highly qualified practitioners, whose expertise continuously develops throughout their career’. Soreide (2007:140) argues that an implication of public narratives is that entry to qualifying training may be restricted to the ‘right’ kind of students, who already ‘ascribe to certain kinds of identity’. Alternatively, she suggests, teacher education may be designed to ensure that new teachers are equipped to meet policy goals.

Watson’s research (2006:512), also informed by a combination of post-structuralist and narrative theories, considers a broader range of resources that shape teachers’ professional identities. These include professional knowledge and ‘wider socio-cultural contexts’ (used with similar meaning to Soreide’s public narratives). In social work, besides the knowledge transmitted through both curriculum and workplace, I suggest that debates about the ‘identity of the profession’ (O’Neill, 1999; Witkin, 1999; Scheider and Netting, 1999) contribute to these shared resources. Second, Watson argues that the ‘micro-politics’ of the setting (2006:512) also provide identity resources; in the case of social work, it is evident that particular kinds of identity may be available in different practice settings (Dutton and Worsley, 2009; Barnes et al., 2000; Moran et al., 2006). Finally, Watson suggests that personal experience is a further resource for professional identity. Certainly, reflection on personal experience is considered an important pedagogical goal of social work education. Lindsey’s research (2005:237) found that students’ ‘most significant learning was about themselves’; and argues that this enhanced self-awareness was ‘directly related to examination of their values’. The development of social work values is considered pivotal for professional identity (Lindsey, 2005; Wong and Pearson, 2007); but Lindsey

emphasises the importance of identifying one's own personal values, and understanding how they interact with professional ones.

In contrast, Lewis (2004) argues that personal experience derived from gender and social class are the most significant factors in constructing professional identity. Drawing on research which suggests that work has gendered meanings, Lewis' exploration of social workers' subjective experiences concludes that women evaluate their career according to its compatibility with family life and personal beliefs (religious, political and feminist). According to Warde (2009:125-128), male social workers are also motivated by personal aspirations; although comparing these two studies it is interesting to note that the men appear to describe their values in more global and abstract terms (a desire to 'help communities' and fulfil a sense of social responsibility). In reporting her data, Lewis (2004:400) asks '[h]as social work as a predominantly female profession achieved liberation for female members of the profession?'. While this is an interesting question, it is not clear whether the participants were asked to talk about their experiences in this feminist context. Nevertheless, both studies open up possibilities for exploring the meaning of professional identity in relation to personal identity.

From an explicitly post-structuralist perspective, both Soreide and Watson draw attention to the complexity of professional identity: it is not singular but involves multiple selves, activated by different discourses and potentially resulting in conflict. This approach is supported by Lewis' finding, that the identities of worker and parent were not easily aligned. Equally thought-provoking is research suggesting that social work students in non-western societies struggle to reconcile their cultural, religious and political values with the dominant assumptions underpinning much social work theory (Wong and Pearson, 2007;

Lam et al., 2007). Costello (2004:138-139), investigating professional identity from an ethnographic perspective, argues that 'there is much about their identities that people cannot articulate'; as a participant observer, Costello found that social work students' style of dress, and their attempts to either look professional, or to 'be themselves' was evidence of 'the ... often painful road to the adoption of a professional identity'. Furthermore, Costello (2004:139) found that 'the process of incorporating a new professional identity varied for people with different personal identities ... [including] gender, race and ethnicity, and religion; class identities'. Finally, identity work takes place in the context of unequal power relationships between students and their teachers. Kaiser (2002:98) argues that the professional identity of medical students is defined as 'not yet being a doctor', which places them in an inferior and powerless position. Taking a combined psychoanalytic and post-structuralist approach, Kaiser (2002:103) argues that students' successful identification as a professional requires a 'closing off' of other aspects of personal identity, and a 'destruction of individuality'. In different ways, these studies draw attention to the potential challenges of constructing a professional identity; the implication for my study is that, in view of the criteria for professional registration, some social work students may find their personal experience a barrier rather than a resource.

Summing up, becoming a professional requires students to do 'identity work' which draws on a range of shared and personal discursive resources. The research suggests that social work education plays a central role in developing professional identity; these arguments are sometimes located within a framework of social learning theory (Adams et al., 2005; Costello, 2004; Wong and Pearson, 2007). This involves a process of socialisation, in which students gradually adopt professional values and norms. Watson (2006:525) suggests that identities develop within a 'community of practice'; this concept, developed

by Etienne Wenger (1998), has been widely adopted to study workplace and professional learning.

### **4.4 Negotiating professional identity through a community of practice**

One of Wenger's central tenets is that identities are negotiated in relation to communities of practice, in which people come together in a joint enterprise, developing a shared repertoire of understandings, and engaging in practices which both define and reinforce the community (Wenger, 1998). A community of practice need not be a 'professional' group (in Wenger's research it was a group of insurance claim administrators), but this concept is particularly relevant for students engaged in professional education. Wenger's work is not in the post-structuralist tradition, but to some extent is compatible with it (Barton and Tusting, 2005; Hughes et al., 2007). Wenger (1998:154) concurs with the view that identity is not stable, but is 'something we constantly renegotiate during the course of our lives'. Wenger views identity as constructed, and people as active and powerful in this process. While he rejects the idea of a fragmented identity, Wenger's concept of a 'nexus' provides for a sense of coherence, in a similar way to Chappell et al.'s (2003) conceptualisation of a narrative identity.

Wenger (1998:154) argues that people follow different 'trajectories' through the community of practice, and that by participating they continually articulate and reinforce their professional identity. So, undertaking the role and responsibilities of, for example, a social worker - and being positioned by others in this way - is an essential vehicle for students to construct their professional identities. Whereas Kaiser (2002) argues that medical students are disempowered by their positioning, Lave and Wenger (1991:29) conceptualise the learner status positively, as 'legitimate peripheral participation' within a

community of practice. The implication for social work students, who spend fifty per cent of their training in supervised practice, is that they can occupy a respected place on the boundaries of the professional community; this offers scope for their identities to be initially fluid, to be shaped by their participation. An advantage of communities of practice is that they facilitate the transmission of informal, non-assessed professional learning (Nicoll and Harrison, 2003; Yam, 2004). Through their status as peripheral participants, social work students thus learn and negotiate different 'repertoires' (Wenger 1998:153) - ways of being and ways of talking - which enable them to eventually engage as full members.

Recalling the research about the challenges of developing professional identity, this process of engagement is unlikely to be straightforward. Wenger asserts that, when an individual belongs to different communities of practice, their different identities might conflict; this is especially the case when people are in 'boundary situations', because 'elements of one repertoire may be quite inappropriate, incomprehensible, or even offensive, in another community' (1998:159-160). This is an important idea to hold in mind, when analysing the research data.

The concept of communities of practice offers a useful framework for analysing professional (especially informal) learning. While Wenger acknowledges the tensions between conflicting identities, a critique of his work is the failure to take account of the effects of power. For example, the legitimacy of students' peripheral participation may be affected by their discursive positioning as minority groups within the dominant culture; and by the differential power between student and teacher. Critics such as Hughes et al. (2007:10) develop Wenger's ideas through introducing a Foucauldian framework, which,

they argue, is ‘of increasing interest in understanding workplace learning ... because of its particular relevance to understanding contemporary corporate governance [in terms of its] ... notions of power, knowledge, subjectivity and discipline’. Hughes et al. (2007:11) also suggest that participation in communities of practice goes further than ‘occupational socialization’, because it ‘demands and entails a reconstruction of the self’. This leads them to consider (2007:11) how Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’, and the learning involved in these, are ‘a crucial generic aspect of participation in communities of practice’.

### **4.5 Learning the professional ‘use of self’**

As I have already suggested, professional education engages students in practising technologies of the self. Practices of self-reflection, of particular interest for Foucault, are well-established in social work education as a means of developing students’ self-awareness and professional identity. Self awareness is considered essential (Davies, 1985; England, 1986; Ward, 2008), to enable students to manage subjective feelings which might lead to bias or prejudice. In addition, social work students are expected to learn what is often called ‘the use of self’ (Harrison and Ruch, 2007). Building helping relationships is considered to be ‘the fundamental core of the profession’ (Burt and Worsley, 2007: 36); and the social worker’s primary ‘tool’ is their capacity to forge such relationships. An early and well-known American social work textbook (Perlman, 1957, cited in Davies, 1985:181-182) explains ‘use of self’ thus:

...this ‘style’ – this spontaneous, honest expression of the self ... flows out from the caseworker’s real concern and respect for the client, out of his being unafraid, either of the person or his problem, and out of his deep wish to be of maximal help ... Style – the helper’s ways of relating, of drawing out feelings, of

responding empathetically, of stimulating and guiding thought, of accrediting and affirming.

Today's social workers operate in a very different organisational climate to the one written about by Perlman and Davies, spending much of their time with computers rather than people. Nevertheless, as a pedagogical concept, 'use of self' remains current (Ward, 2008; Fook and Askreland, 2007). From a theoretical perspective, the humanist notion of an enduring, authentic, non-judgmental self, rather than a partial and fluid one, is problematic; but the point is that, in social work education, 'the self' - however it is conceptualised - continues to be a resource for professional practice; and the ability to 'use the self' is a part of professional knowledge. Acquiring this self-knowledge is not easy. Fook and Askreland (2007:525) suggest that both students and qualified workers find it challenging to integrate personal qualities and responses into professional practice'. In this respect, I suggest registration might be an additional source of tension, because the self to be exposed and reflected on, in a pedagogical context, must be scrutinised and judged in a regulatory one.

### **4.6 Conclusion**

Before turning to consider the methodology and the data, it will be helpful to summarise the arguments put forward in this and the previous chapters. My starting point is that professional registration has blurred the relationship between social work students' private and working lives, and that this change is worthy of investigation. The aim of the research, therefore, is to explore how registration affects the way that social work students construct their personal and professional identities. Post-structuralist concepts provide, I suggest, a relevant framework for making sense of the regulatory context in which social work students are learning to be professionals. I view professional identity as one of an

## Chapter 4: Professional identity

individual's multiple identities, constructed through drawing on shared discursive resources. The introduction of the Social Work Degree has been viewed as an opportunity to 'forge a new professional identity, one of which practitioners, managers, clients and carers can be proud' (Preston-Shoot 2004:690). In a sense, however, that professional identity may be a regulated - and perhaps contested - one.

The next part of the thesis discusses the research process and methodology. Chapter 5 describes how the data was obtained; and chapter 6 clarifies the methods and theoretical assumptions used in discourse analysis.



## **Part 2**

### **Research process and methodology**

## Chapter 5

### Obtaining the data

#### 5.1 Introduction

The research questions were designed to explore the relationship between social work students' personal and professional identities, in the light of the newly introduced policy of professional registration. To investigate this, I decided to use semi-structured interviews and a version of discourse analysis. I will go on to discuss, in chapter 6, the theoretical assumptions underpinning the analysis; here I want to describe how I obtained the data: considering in particular the ethical and practical issues relating to the research design, the process of identifying potential participants, and interviewing.

#### 5.2 Resolving ethical issues

From an ethical perspective, the recruitment method required considerable thought. I had initially planned to recruit participants from a database of students whose circumstances had been investigated by the Social Work Programme in relation to criminal offences, employment disciplinary investigations, or other 'conduct and character' issues. On further reflection, however, I perceived difficulties with this approach. Firstly, it would have breached data protection protocols to use the programme's confidential information for research purposes. Furthermore, signalling to this group of students that they were 'different' might have caused distress (and from a methodological perspective could have had a negative effect on the response rate). I therefore decided to expand the 'target' group to include *any* students who were willing to talk about their experiences of professional registration, even if this had not involved a suitability investigation.

A third consideration arose from changes in my professional role. During the initial stages of the study, I took up a management position on the Social Work Programme; this gave me access to personal data about the research population, and the power to make decisions about students' 'suitability' to enter or remain on the programme. The challenge, therefore, has been to separate my professional and research roles sufficiently to prevent conflicts of interest and behave ethically in both respects. Along with my invitation letter, I provided full information about my dual role (Appendix 3), and gave strong reassurances about confidentiality, with a proviso noted below. At the request of the student research panel (see below), the letter was signed by my manager to provide endorsement from the programme. The letter was not addressed to individual students, and although sent to their home or email addresses, it was clarified that all students in the region were being contacted. As an additional safeguard, I asked the programme manager to 'screen' the list of potential participants and remove the name of any student who was currently under investigation. These measures reduced the potential for a conflict of interest, and distress to students. It is worth observing that, on a methodological level, it was in my interests to maximise the quality of the responses by reassuring potential participants that they could speak in relative confidence.

One final ethical issue needed consideration at the recruitment stage: professional registration is a sensitive topic because it potentially entails the discussion of criminal offences and similar issues. There was always the possibility that a participant might disclose something in the interview which they had not reported to the GSCC. Research ethics would normally guarantee confidentiality; but I am employed on a professional programme which must fulfil strict conditions of approval by the regulatory body, and withholding such information might compromise both myself and the University. My

confidentiality agreement with students therefore included a paragraph, used in the Social Work Programme's standard documentation, advising them that - in exceptional circumstances - it may not be possible to treat certain disclosures as confidential.

The university's ethical panel granted permission to conduct the research (Appendix 4), although it recommended that my letter should advise participants of the potentially emotive nature of the material I would be asking them to discuss. I followed this advice, and did not notice any particular effects when conducting the interviews. It is possible that some students were deterred from responding, but in view of the sensitivity of the topic I felt that this was ethically appropriate.

Ethical challenges arose at all stages of the research, from the initial design to decisions I made about analysis and reporting. I have focused, here, on the earlier stages of the research; issues arising in the analysis and reporting will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

### **5.3 Recruiting participants**

My letter and information sheet appealed for volunteers who were interested in discussing their 'experiences of professional registration' and of 'developing a sense of themselves as a social worker [and] ... links between professional identity and personal identity'. The letter was inclusively worded, with particular reassurance for students who had experienced actual or potential difficulties with registration.

With over a thousand social work students at the University, I decided to contact only those currently studying the second and third level modules, which focused on social work

practice and professional skills. First level students were excluded, because in a previous research project, I found that they had not yet engaged with the concept of professional identity. I confined the initial mailing to students in three regions (selected to combine geographical spread with a realistic travelling distance). In my university, when the research involves students, additional permission must be sought from a special panel (separate from the ethical panel), which co-ordinates research requests to ensure that students are not overloaded with unwelcome or multiple research studies. The panel provided contact details for the 'available' students.

My first invitation thus went out by post to 160 students. Although I was not expecting a high response, I was nevertheless disappointed to receive only three replies. Following consultation with the student research panel, I sent follow-up emails and also contacted the corresponding students in three additional regions. Shortly afterwards, with permission from the ethical and student panels, I took up the course leaders' offer to publicise the research and appeal for volunteers through the student websites. These further measures led to another three replies. In addition, a seventh volunteer - who had been through a suitability investigation - was recruited through a regional colleague. I considered trying to recruit additional participants (for example, from other universities). However, the process of obtaining permissions from the two panels had been quite complex and lengthy, and I was fearful of the impact that further delay would have on my timetable for transcription and analysis.

When selecting participants, it is usually considered important to obtain a representative sample and avoid bias (Faulkner et al., 1991). However, my participants were few in number and self-selecting (within the parameters described above), and it was not possible

to seek any kind of representativeness. In discourse analysis this is not seen as a problem because, as we'll see in chapter 6, the methodology is not seeking a 'true picture'. It is nevertheless important to be transparent, because the nature of the sample will influence the data that is produced. I asked participants to supply basic biographical information (Appendix 5). There was a reasonable mix in terms of age and gender, and participants originated from both within and outside the UK. All students were sponsored by their employer; they came from a range of work backgrounds, mainly in the statutory sectors: adult social care, child care, housing, education and mental health. There was a good geographical spread, with four regions represented among the participants: North, North West, West Midlands and London.

### 5.4 Interviewing

My initial piloting of focus groups had shown the value of seeking 'interaction rather than answers' (Bloor et al., 2001) when undertaking a discourse analysis. In designing the interviews, therefore, I wanted to facilitate a relatively informal space in which participants could develop their own themes and narratives in response to a list of topics, rather than questions. I took advice from Reynolds and Wetherell (2003:495), who structured interviews in the shape of a 'guided but informal conversation', in which the researcher introduces topics designed to elicit talk. The aim was not to arrive at 'truth', but rather to provide data which could be analysed in relation to discourses. Although I was especially interested in participants' experience of suitability processes, I wanted to find out how these affected students' professional *and* personal identities, so the interviews needed to take a wider view.

For semi-structured interviews, researchers are usually advised to draw up a schedule consisting of 'topics to be covered rather than a formal list of questions' (Stroh, 2000: 207). Mine consisted of thirteen topics to be covered flexibly and selectively over the course of the interview, and my personal copy (Appendix 6) included suggested wording and prompts. The first two questions, designed partly as an 'ice-breaker', asked students about themselves and their route onto the Social Work Programme. The schedule then explored students' conceptualisation of personal and professional identities, including examples from their practice placements. The rest of the schedule explored students' experiences of professional registration and their understanding of its implications.

Chase (1995, in Elliott, 2005:28) emphasises the importance of asking participants 'simple questions that clearly relate to their life experiences'. Similarly, both Ball (1991) and Nias (1991) found interviewees more responsive when discussing their own day to day experiences than a specific topic chosen by the researcher. On the other hand, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) found open-ended questions less satisfactory than asking people to talk about specific times and situations. As I was interested in generating data with some narrative characteristics, I followed this advice: revising, for example, an initial draft question 'what's your image of a 'professional social worker'?' to 'tell me about an example of when you first began to experience yourself as a 'professional social worker''. As I had piloted a different approach in the early stages of my study, I used the first two interviews to test the methodology. Both went well, and only minor changes were made to the schedule thereafter.

Interviews can raise ethical concerns about the researcher's interpretation (Wilkinson, 1998:112-114):

particularly in relation to the potentially exploitative nature of the interaction in which the researcher controls the proceedings, regulates the conversation, reveals minimal personal information, and imposes her own framework of meaning on participants.

Even when measures are taken to balance power within the interview context, the researcher retains a high degree of power over the analysis and presentation of the data (Wilkinson, 1998:114). I was conscious of the sensitive power relationship between myself and the participants, and was keen to work in a way which recognised this. I considered it important that participants felt able to exercise some measure of control over the discussion.

I offered the participants choice about where and when the interview took place. Aware that students were juggling academic study with a four day working week, I went out to meet them at the end of their working day, first thing in the morning, or on their study days. Three participants chose to be interviewed at home; one in a public library; two in University offices; and one by telephone (recorded). The arrangements were made by telephone, text and email, and these initial exchanges provided an important opportunity to develop a sense of rapport before meeting. They also enabled me to provide a broad overview of the topics to be addressed; the written schedule was then handed to each participant at the start of the interview. Participants were advised that they could stop the interviews at any point (Appendix 7), and I was open about the recording by showing them how the equipment worked. Having a visible list of topics did seem to be empowering for participants, as they were able to anticipate and influence the general direction of the interview. It also created a sense of 'co-construction' as we mulled over the meaning of



terms and phrases. After each interview I emailed or texted the participant to thank them and to ask if ‘they had felt ok about the interview’. In each case I got a positive reply: one person described the interview as a ‘great opportunity to reflect’.

Two interviews lasted around ninety minutes, and the others about an hour. The face-to-face interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, and the audio files were subsequently transferred to my own computer. The telephone interview was recorded using a confidential password-protected service (Appendix 8), which created an audio file on a website. This file was saved to my own computer and the original deleted from the website. I sent each person their transcript, substituting a suggested pseudonym for their real name, and with references to other people’s names and geographical locations removed. I invited comments and amendments, and suggestions for a different pseudonym, but no changes were requested.

The slow process of recruiting participants resulted in a simultaneous process of interviewing and transcribing over a period of ten months. I began by listening to each recorded interview all the way through, pausing the audio-file to note the location of potential topics of interest. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, using a simplified form of Gee’s (1986) method which is described in chapter 7. Once I had a body of completed transcripts, the next step was to read them analytically: this will be discussed in chapter 6.

### **5.5 Discussion and conclusion**

This chapter shows the importance of understanding the inter-relationship between different stages of the research process. I found it useful to have a reasonably clear

theoretical framework and set of research questions at the outset; because not only did this guide the initial plan, but it also informed decisions when I had to adapt my approach to resolve ethical and practical difficulties. For example, I had several attempts at designing an interview schedule which would produce sufficiently full data for a discourse analysis. This effort repaid itself, as when I went on to transcribe and analyse the data, I was pleasantly surprised by its richness. I also learned that the research design needs to be flexible enough to respond to external constraints and opportunities. When the initial response was very low, I felt constrained by my dependence on busy colleagues to send out the invitations again. However, when I took up the opportunity to post the invitation on the students' course website, I found that the paperwork was easily adapted. A slight disadvantage of this amended method was that, as the responses came from a wider geographical area, I had to travel further for the interviews. Nevertheless, this method offered a way to seek participants without needing to approach students individually. In retrospect, this might have been a more productive approach from the start.

I had hoped to interview between ten and twenty students but only managed to recruit seven, only two of whom had experienced any kind of conduct investigation. It is worth reflecting on possible reasons for the difficulty in recruiting participants; especially those who had experienced a specific issue with their registration. In my invitation letters, I had aimed to make the interviews sound interesting and worthwhile, and had attempted to show sensitivity to the student position by acknowledging that talking about past experiences can be difficult. One participant volunteered that he had been attracted by the tone of my letter. Nevertheless, the overall response was very low, and my carefully worded approach did not enable me to directly recruit students with suitability issues. It is possible that students were apprehensive about talking to someone in my professional role, and that the topic was

even more sensitive than I had anticipated. On the other hand, those who did take part were unsurprised by the low response, suggesting that the main reason was likely to be the pressures on students' time. So, what prompted these seven students to volunteer? One person was approached by my colleague and was fortunately prepared to share her difficult experience. Four students expressed a future interest in doing research, explaining that they wanted to gain insight into the process. Altruism may have played some part for the other two, who had undertaken research in previous work or student roles and said they knew how hard it was to recruit participants. Feedback indicated that participants had found the interviews helpful and timely, in that they were writing their final assignments which required them to discuss their professional development. With the benefit of hindsight and my data analysis, I suggest that the interviews may have provided a reflective space in which professional identities could be tested out.

Finally, I have emphasised the importance of thinking through the ethical issues. Although in some ways I regret being unable to resolve the difficulties of approaching students who had experienced suitability investigations, it gave me confidence to know that I had designed the research with the fullest possible consideration for students' privacy and sensitivity. As discussed above, it is possible that the topic was even more sensitive than I had initially realised. This does not exclude the possibility of researching this group of students in the future, but the approach would need further thought. The ethical issues arising from the researcher's power to interpret meaning will be discussed in chapter 6, although despite my best efforts, I found no entirely comfortable solution.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Research methodology (discourse analysis)**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The term methodology refers not only to the methods used for data collection and analysis, but also to the theoretical assumptions which inform them (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998:3). I have argued, in the first part of this thesis, that identities are multiple and constructed within discourse; now I show how my chosen method derives from this theoretical approach. My aim is to explore the potential impact of registration on social work students' identities. To analyse the transcribed interview data, I will be using a form of discourse analysis developed from the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987); Edley's critical discursive psychology approach (2001); and Taylor and Littleton's narrative discursive approach (2006). These methods all draw on the premise that discourses construct, and are expressed through, everyday social practices and interaction; they consider broad cultural and discursive meanings, but take a particular interest in how people construct identity through spoken language. In this chapter I explain why I chose this method of discourse analysis rather than others; reiterate the implications of its theoretical principles for the analysis; and describe and discuss the analytical tools to be applied.

#### **6.2 Selecting a relevant method of obtaining data**

A wide variety of qualitative methods are adopted in post-structuralist research; for example: focus groups (Wilkinson, 1998); interviews (Watson, 2006; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003); ethnographic work (Edley and Wetherell, 1997); and textual analysis (Nicol and Harrison, 2003; Soreide, 2007). What distinguishes the approach is its epistemological basis, which has implications for the way data is treated.

In reviewing research methods, I considered alternative ways of studying the construction of identity through language. For example, Rai (2006) conducted a textual analysis of social work students' reflective writing; and Reynolds (2007) analysed nursing and social work students' talk in online discussion forums. As I had routine access to both sources of data in my role as a social work lecturer, these methods initially seemed attractive; but my earlier attempt to explore professional registration (see chapter 1) suggested that students were unlikely to raise this topic spontaneously or explicitly. I also had ethical reservations about using the teaching forums for my purpose. I briefly considered introducing a specific online forum, but there were practical reasons for not pursuing this.

Focus groups seemed initially suitable because of their potential for stimulating social interaction (Parker and Tritter, 2006). I noted in chapter 1 that, in my first year of study, I designed and conducted two focus groups; these provided an invaluable indication of the discourses that social work students drew on to discuss registration and professional identity (Appendix 1), but they proved difficult to schedule. I decided, therefore, to conduct individual interviews which could more flexibly take account of the considerable demands on social work students' time.

Interviews are an established method of collecting data within a post-structuralist framework, although the data is treated differently from some other qualitative approaches (phenomenology, for example). In keeping with the theoretical premise that 'truth' and 'reality' are constructed, data is not generally treated as referential - a representation of 'how things really are' - but constitutive: that is, it constructs the meaning of the topics discussed (Taylor, 2001a:6-7). An interview is taken to be a constructed and situated social interaction, in which talk serves a particular function (Wilkinson, 1998:120). The role of

the interviewer is not to gather facts, but rather to generate interaction and co-construct meaning, in a specific context, with the participant. One implication of this is that the interviewer does not attempt to be 'neutral' or 'objective', and, as argued by Wilkinson (1998:120) '[t]he effect of the interviewer upon the data collected is ...not a problem, but a feature of interviewing'. I reflect on these points when discussing the analysis.

### **6.3 Finding an appropriate method of analysis**

My interest in the discursive meanings of professional registration led me to consider the wide range of discourse analysis techniques included within the broad framework of post-structuralist theory. Wetherell et al. (2001:6) refer to six 'more or less distinct' traditions (and, by their own acknowledgement, they are being selective): conversation analysis and ethnomethodology; interactional sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication; critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics; Bakhtinian research; discursive psychology; and Foucauldian research. An alternative way of differentiating between different kinds of discourse analysis is to compare what they actually do with their data: Taylor (2001a) puts forward four approaches.

The first approach (Taylor, 2001a:7), which includes sociolinguistic methods, is concerned with variations in the way language is used in different social situations or environments, or among different groups of people. The second approach (typified by conversation analysis) focuses on language as an activity: 'investigating the to-and-fro of interactions ... between at least two parties and looking for patterns in what the ... speakers ... do'. Conversation analysis involves a very detailed interrogation of social interaction, for example: the length of pauses; the sequencing of turn-taking; hesitations and 'repairs'; and the use of 'accounting practices' such as apologies and excuses. Neither approach seems to

offer sufficient scope to explore the wider discursive context of registration: indeed, a principle of conversation analysis is to look only at what is evident from the transcript. Furthermore, conversation analysis - derived from ethnomethodology - is used to analyse 'naturally occurring' data, rather than interviews; such data would have been difficult for me to obtain. An advantage of this method, however, is that it draws attention to the functions and nuances of talk and turn-taking in the interview context.

In the third approach, used in the discursive psychology of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Edley (2001), the researcher looks for language patterns associated with a particular topic. This draws attention to

how new terms enable people to talk about different things; for example a student generally learns new vocabulary as part of the process of becoming familiar with a new field of work. ... There is also a sense in which language is constitutive; that is, it creates what it refers to (Taylor 2001a:8).

The third approach is very relevant for investigating my research questions; but I am also attracted to the fourth approach, which draws explicitly on Foucault's theories to examine how language and social practices:

[construct] aspects of society and the people within it. ... [This] form of discourse analysis ... involves the study of power and resistance, contest and struggles. The basic assumption here is that language available to people enables and constrains not only their expression of certain ideas but also what they do (Taylor 2001a:9).

In practice, Taylor explains, the lines between these four approaches may be blurred; this is especially true of the third and fourth approaches, because both are based on the connections between wider discourses (not just language), power and knowledge. The

‘genealogical’ approach is used to study the regulatory and discursive effects of social policies (Carabine, 2001); I gave serious consideration to using this method for the entire study, but had a number of reservations. As a historical approach, genealogy analyses data from the past, albeit the recent past; indeed, Foucault argues that a system of discourse can only be examined retrospectively (O’Farrell, 2005). In addition, genealogy appears to be applied mainly to written data. As professional registration was relatively new when I began the research, I felt it might be difficult to find sufficient and suitable written data. Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter 2, during the early stages of my research I drew on this method to analyse written decisions made by the Care Standards Tribunal (Appendix 2). I also experimented with a form of textual analysis based on Clarke and Newman’s (Clarke, 2000b) approach, to explore the meanings contained in regulatory documents. This mixture of textual and genealogical analysis has not been developed in depth for this thesis, but the findings have nevertheless contributed to the discursive context which informed the data analysis.

After consideration, for the main part of the study I have chosen to analyse spoken language - typically referred to in the discourse analysis literature as ‘talk’ - generated in semi-structured interviews. To analyse this data, the approach that seems most appropriate for my purpose is an adapted form of the ‘hybrid’ discursive psychology approach used by Potter and Wetherell (1987), which takes elements from both Foucauldian theory and conversation analysis (Wetherell, 1998). Wetherell et al. (2001:6) suggest that the field of discourse studies is ‘very recent and embryonic compared to other areas of social science’; consequently, ‘[e]ach new discourse researcher builds on, adds to, extends and transforms previous ways of identifying, classifying and theorizing order’. In my case, I have incorporated elements from two subsequent developments in discursive psychology:



Edley's 'critical discursive psychology' (2001); and Taylor and Littleton's 'narrative discursive' approach (2006). In bringing these approaches together, I aim to maintain theoretical coherence; I suggest that my method is best seen as a variation within the 'discursive psychology' strand of analysis. Before elaborating on the analytic tools to be used, it will be helpful to reiterate the theoretical assumptions which inform them. Briefly:

- In keeping with a post-structuralist Foucauldian approach, I start from the assumption that people's talk is situated within discourse and the wider social, cultural and political context. When I examine what people say, I look for potential connections between this talk and wider discourses. I am alert to how people's talk implies certain power relationships, both in and outside the interview setting. I examine the subject positions that are taken up through people's talk, and how people position themselves in relation to discourses, for example to comply or resist.
- I regard 'truth' and 'reality' as constructed. Thus, the meanings produced in the interview are co-constructed by the participant and myself. My subsequent interpretation has produced a further version of reality.
- Following the theoretical premise that identities are fluid and multiple, the identities which are expressed in the interview context are not the only versions. This does not mean that they are not 'genuine', but rather, that they are a particular version constructed on that occasion.
- I acknowledge the idea that people strive to construct the semblance of a continuous, coherent identity (sometimes referred to as a narrative identity).
- I treat language as a form of social action which has a function, including the construction of an identity. Language is not taken to be 'neutral', or simply

descriptive, but as something which constructs the identities and other concepts that are being discussed.

- Accordingly, in this form of analysis, talk is not treated as a direct reflection of what people think, or of inner mental processes. I therefore accept that discourse analysis does not attempt to reveal attitudes or personal motivations, or to uncover unconscious meanings. This does not mean that these mental processes don't exist, but the method is not suited to exploring them.
- While focusing on talk, I acknowledge that identity is also constructed and communicated in other social and cultural activities.

I now go on to outline the analytical concepts to be used, showing how they derive from post-structuralist ideas.

#### **6.4 Analytical concepts used**

This form of discourse analysis involves identifying and studying the discursive resources that people use to construct meaning and deal with problems and contradictions that arise in talk. Following the theoretical assumption that these resources are culturally shared (see chapters 3 and 4), rather than unique to each individual, certain 'patterns' emerge when transcripts of talk are analysed. Three analytic concepts are central to my approach: interpretative repertoires; responding to the dilemmas raised by conflicting repertoires; and positioning.

##### *6.4.1 Interpretative repertoires*

The resources for constructing meaning are sometimes referred to as interpretative repertoires, a concept developed in the social sciences by Potter and Wetherell (1987)

denoting the range of ‘common sense’ ideas that people utilise to talk about and understand familiar contexts. Repertoires can be recognised by similar words and lines of argument, as well as (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:149) ‘particular stylistic and grammatical constructions [and] ... specific metaphors and figures of speech’ across different speakers’ transcripts. For example, in my research, students adopt a common range of repertoires to talk about social work education. Almost all draw on the concept of ‘opportunity’; for example a student says she ‘could never have afforded to leave [work] and go to university ... saw the [course] and asked my employer to sponsor me’. On the other hand, a common pattern of talk relates to the demanding and time-consuming nature of the course; a typical observation is ‘I’ve sold my soul at the moment, I feel very bogged down with it all.... I feel I have no life’. A third repertoire represents social work education as a process of continual surveillance: ‘you feel a bit under scrutiny the whole time ... when you’re on placement, people looking at you’. Another feature of a repertoire - evident in these illustrations - is that speakers may not elaborate or explain their meaning, because the knowledge is shared and taken for granted within the context (Reynolds, 2007). As we will see in chapter 7, it is equally important to look for variations between speakers, which might prompt the analyst to explore whether certain participants are drawing on alternative repertoires.

Interpretative repertoires are closely linked with Foucault’s idea of discourse. Edley (2001:202) argues that both concepts:

invoke the idea of repositories of meaning; that is, distinctive ways of talking about objects and events in the world. What is more, both [concepts] ... see this fact as having the same major implication; namely, that in becoming native speakers,

people are enticed or encultured into particular, even partial, ways of understanding the world.

I suggest, also, that in some cases, interpretative repertoires express, in everyday form, the ‘truths’ which are conveyed through formal discourse.

#### *6.4.2 Ideological dilemmas*

Closely related to the idea of interpretative repertoires, and developed around the same time by Billig et al. (1988), is the concept of ‘ideological dilemmas’. Just as interpretative repertoires are common sense ways of talking about ‘objects and events in the world’ (Edley, 2001:198), so the term ‘lived ideologies’ refers to everyday common sense beliefs, values and practices that guide people’s actions. Dilemmas arise from the contradictory meanings and assumptions associated with competing interpretative repertoires (Edley, 2001). Taking an example from Reynolds’ (2007:451) research on nursing students:

A number of ideological dilemmas [arose] from the different repertoires for inter-professional working ... One example relates to positive repertoires of the importance of service user participation ... A message on this theme, which received some support, announced ‘I am all for promoting the expert patient, but let’s not lose the expert nurse’.

Billig et al. argue that ideological dilemmas are not simply a choice to be made between two courses of action; they arise because ‘common sense contains conflicting, indeed dissonant, themes’ (1988:20) underpinned by different views of human nature, such as the relationship between the individual and society, and ‘issues of freedom and constraint’ (1988:55). In the extract above, the students are torn between their support for service users’ views (a professionally valued discourse) and the perceived potential threat to their

own professional expertise. It is clear, therefore, that the dilemmatic nature of competing repertoires resonates with Foucault's theory that discourses continually change and co-exist. Another way of thinking about ideological dilemmas is that they occur in the discursive space or 'argumentative texture' (Wetherell, 1998:393) in which multiple discourses intersect. The implication for discourse analysis is that in everyday talk, a person can hold and express a mixture of views. When speakers become aware of the contradictions, they encounter ideological dilemmas, finding themselves 'involved in difficult choices and ... having to make compromises' (Billig et al., 1988:46). As I discuss later, in order to reconcile the inconsistencies, speakers have to perform certain kinds of 'rhetorical work'.

An interesting point in Billig et al.'s argument is that opposing positions are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent; having developed together as two sides of the same debate. Derived from a common culture, these contrasting arguments are 'recognizable and usable by advocates on either side of [the] debate' (Billig et al., 1988:45). For this reason, the dilemmatic nature of common sense acts as a resource for people to conceptualise and argue a position. This adds an interesting perspective to the concept of resistance to discourse. If debate enables speakers to formulate different perspectives and positions, then at a 'macro' level this suggests that resistance is necessary for a discourse to evolve. At the 'micro' level, the implication is that, when talking about everyday topics, people can feel themselves 'pushed and pulled in opposing directions' (Billig et al., 1988:161). Ideological dilemmas, and their implications, provide useful analytical tools for interpreting my data.

### *6.4.3 Positioning*

Foucault's conception of subject position is important in proposing how people are placed - or place themselves - in relation to a discourse. Positioning offers a resource to explore the identities that are taken up through social interaction. Speakers embrace or resist cultural meanings implied by discourses or interpretative repertoires. For example, the people who took part in my research are positioned as 'students'; I myself have a dual position as 'lecturer' and 'student researcher'. Edley (2001:209-210) asserts that because people are not only subjects of discourse, but may actively construct subject positions in their talk, positioning can fluctuate within and between conversations. In my interviews, participants present themselves both as novices and experienced workers. People may also position themselves in relation to others (Edley and Wetherell, 1997). Recalling Wenger's (1998) ideas, professional learning takes place in a community of practice. It could be argued that the workplace community (and to some extent the education community) provide a discursive space for the student to develop professional identity, through the process of positioning themselves, and being positioned by others, as a social worker. As discussed in chapter 4, professional identity is not static, therefore, but is continually renewed through the social interactions of the workplace. And, as I have come to understand, my interviews also take place in these communities of practice.

Discursive meanings are not only expressed through talk. Taylor and Littleton (2006) suggest that people can be positioned by the circumstances of the social interaction, including a person's appearance, or references made to their past life or experiences. For example, in some interviews, I referred to my past employment as a social worker; and my age and gender might also have positioned me in a particular way. The narrative-discursive approach holds that people's talk is used to construct a sense of a continuous identity.

People can thus be positioned by previous versions (Taylor and Littleton, 2006:23) of the selves they have already presented. For example, one participant had taken part in my focus groups the previous year; so each of us probably positioned the other before we met for the interview. Previous versions of identity can, of course, act as a constraint as well as a resource.

People do not always 'slot into' the places appointed for them in a discourse. In social interaction, contradictory repertoires may give rise to dilemmas, forcing a choice about the way a speaker positions themselves; or leading them to avoid making a choice (Taylor and Littleton, 2008). Resolutions can lead to further dilemmas: for example, in my research, a student presents herself as a person with integrity and then quickly adjusts this position to avoid seeming immodest. Speakers may resist discursive meanings and reject the 'expected' subject position: one participant surprised me by suddenly interjecting that she 'hated being a student'. Positioning, and its complexities, provide a fruitful analytic resource, enabling the researcher to observe identity work taking place.

So far, then, I have discussed three analytic tools: examining the use of interpretative repertoires, the response to dilemmas, and positioning. A relatively new approach developed by Edley (2001) is 'critical discursive psychology', which brings these three tools together as a 'package for discourse analysis' (Reynolds, 2007:5) and emphasises the connection between them. In order to construct a subject position, people draw on the cultural and linguistic resources of interpretative repertoires. In acting out particular subject positions, people encounter, and have to make choices about, ideological dilemmas (Edley, 2001). Critical discursive psychology makes explicit use of Foucault's ideas about discourse, and has offered a fruitful starting point for exploring my research questions and

analysing the focus groups. However, I had a relatively small number of transcripts to work with, whereas this method seems to work best with a larger number (Edley and Wetherell, 1999 refer to thirty interviews, including over sixty participants). I also want to draw on additional tools which are not used in this method; for example, Taylor and Littleton (2006) build on Edley's approach but have added the concept of 'local resources', which shows how a speaker 'personalises' interpretative repertoires. As well as considering the use of local resources, I also examine the function of rhetorical work and accounting; and draw on the linked concepts of 'trouble' and 'repair'.

#### *6.4.4 Local resources*

Taylor and Littleton (2008:281) have developed the analytic concept of 'local resources'. These include the personalisation of repertoires; previous versions of identity; accounts of significant experiences and memories; and personal meanings. Local meanings act as an identity resource, alongside wider discourses and interpretative repertoires. A speaker's gender and class, might, for example, prompt an analysis of interpretative repertoires associated with those categories; alternatively, they can be explored in terms of the personal meanings constructed by the individual speaker (Taylor and Littleton, 2006). In my data, when a participant presented himself as 'white, male, gay', he did not elaborate on these self-descriptions, expecting me to share his understanding of their cultural meanings. Local resources can also include the 'lore and learning' of a particular profession (Taylor and Littleton, 2008:281): for example, students in my study frequently referred to the GSCC Codes of Practice. These analytical developments make it possible to examine how different speakers make use of wider discourses.



*6.4.5 Rhetorical strategies and accounting*

Billig et al. (1988) discuss a number of rhetorical strategies, explained by Potter and Wetherell (1987:187) as ‘the use of discourse to persuasive effect’. For example, a speaker might argue a case more strongly by juxtaposing certain words, drawing contrasts and so on. Rhetorical strategies are important for understanding how discourses and interpretative repertoires are utilised in identity construction. For instance, a speaker’s positioning might become fragile or contested if they express unpopular opinions or find themselves in a minority in a particular context. In this case, the speaker has to adopt a rhetorical strategy to ‘save face’ or defend their position. This level of detail is usually associated with conversation analysis, but Billig et al.’s approach chimes with Foucauldian methods, in that rhetorical strategies reflect underlying discourses. They emphasise (1988:110) the importance of being alert to ‘the ideological aspects of conversational themes’; in other words, ordinary talk is not just made up of ‘conversational gambits’, but reflects a particular view of the world. Rhetorical strategies can also, I suggest, enable speakers to exercise choice and power within discourse, persuading the listener to accept their particular version. Wetherell (1998:403) argues that the analyst should ‘look ... to the broader forms of intelligibility running thorough the [argumentative] texture’. This is where I reap the benefits from my earlier textual analysis, as the wider regulatory discourse provides an invaluable resource for analysing the interview data.

One particular kind of rhetorical strategy is ‘accounting’, through which people explain their own and others’ behaviour, or deal with inconsistencies and problems in their talk. Common accounting strategies which are used in discourse analysis include excuses, justifications and disclaimers. Accounts are analysed differently according to the theoretical approach: in the study of social psychology, accounts are of interest because

they expose the rules at work in social interaction (Potter and Wetherell, 1987); whereas in conversation analysis, the focus is on the location of an account within a linguistic sequence. In conversation analysis, the study of accounting practices can become very detailed: Potter and Wetherell (1987:78) refer to Semin and Manstead's typology which lists over thirty different kinds. In keeping with the post-structuralist approach, however, I have looked at accounting in terms of the discursive resources used in constructing identity.

Significantly, excuses and justifications are framed according to conventions, and 'drawing on a range of pre-existing resources' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:76). Thus refusal of a dinner party invitation is usually formulated in socially acceptable and standard terms: not 'because the host's friends are so boring ... but because you have another, more pressing, arrangement' (1987:86). Accounts are of interest because they may reveal underlying broad assumptions, sometimes invoking a particular view about human nature. Potter and Wetherell (1987:112) suggest, for example, that excusing certain kinds of violent behaviour rests on the assumption that 'an aggressive response to provocation is ... natural or pre-programmed in human beings'.

#### 6.4.6 *'Trouble' and 'repair'*

I have argued that conflicting repertoires and discourses may lead to dilemmas which people try to resolve in their talk. Sometimes these unexpected inconsistencies are analysed in terms of 'trouble' (Wetherell, 1998). A troubled identity occurs when the speaker presents material which is implausible or inconsistent with other identities that are claimed in the same instance of social interaction. It may be that the cultural associations of a prior positioning are difficult to reconcile with a new one. In my study, a participant

presents her voluntary and unqualified care work as an extension of her parenting experience; this position becomes problematic when, later in the interview she describes ‘holding herself back’ lest her ‘mother’s instincts’ cause her to act unprofessionally. Trouble may also occur, in a narrative approach, when speakers present conflicting life trajectories; in Taylor and Littleton’s research (2006) an art graduate is torn between her own employment aspirations and her parents’ expectations for her career.

There appears to be a degree of overlap between the concepts of ‘trouble’ and ‘ideological dilemmas’. The difference between them, I suggest, relates to their separate theoretical roots. Trouble, associated with conversation analysis, is identified through observing the linguistic patterns that suggest problems or inconsistencies (pauses, for instance; or starting to say something and then amending it). Ideological dilemmas, on the other hand, are identified through noticing the competing discursive meanings which are expressed through interruptions in the pattern of talk. In practice, some convergence may be inevitable, given the subjective nature of discourse analysis<sup>8</sup>. My own approach is that I use the concept of trouble to alert me, in a general way, to inconsistencies which, on closer analysis, may – or may not – turn out to signal an ideological dilemma.

‘Repair’ refers to the speaker’s response to trouble: for example, repeated explanations and re-statement. Trouble actually prompts repair (Wetherell, 1998) as the speaker tries to maintain or restore continuity, although it may be difficult to resolve (Taylor and Littleton (2006). In analysing data, therefore, trouble may not always be accompanied by repair, but its presence is likely to require further analytical attention.

---

<sup>8</sup> I appreciate that conversation analysts would argue that their method is objective.

#### *6.4.7 Narratives*

I have utilised some elements of Taylor and Littleton's (2006) narrative-discursive approach, which resonates with the idea of a narrative identity (Chappell et al., 2003) discussed in chapter 3. This method differs from narrative research which analyses a story's structure (for example, Labov and Waletzky, 1997, cited in Elliott, 2005), or its genre - for example, the heroic and canonical narratives proposed by Bruner, 1997 - discussed by Taylor and Littleton (2006). Instead, Taylor and Littleton identify 'narrative fragments' of talk - sections of data which evoke a sense of sequence and consequence, such as memories or the unfolding of a life story - and analyse their function as a discursive resource for the speaker's construction of identity.

Like other forms of discourse analysis, the narrative-discursive method uses the concept of interpretative repertoires, which are part of the stock of culturally available 'stories' available for constructing a narrative identity (Elliott, 2005; Taylor and Littleton, 2006; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). A particular advantage of the narrative approach is that it allows previously told versions of identity to contribute to the construction of a coherent, continuous identity (Taylor and Littleton, 2006). Conversely, discrepancies or disruptions in the recounting of life stories may appear as trouble, which needs to be repaired in the interview. Previous versions can also constrain the scope of new identities.

Summing up, therefore, my method is derived from within the tradition of discursive psychology, drawing on both established and newer approaches to analysing talk. This provided me with a very useful range of analytic resources: these involve the examination of interpretative repertoires; subject positions and positioning; ideological dilemmas; local resources; rhetorical strategies; accounting practices and the concepts of trouble and its

repair. Before moving on to the analysis, it will be useful to raise some potential challenges with my approach.

### **6.5 Challenges of this method**

I am sensitive to three potential difficulties with my chosen method. These relate to the adoption of an eclectic approach; the handling of emotion and ‘mental states’; and the treatment of biographical data.

Wetherell et al. (2001) suggest that, because discourse analysis is still a relatively evolving method, it is acceptable to take an eclectic approach. The wide variety of methods offers a rich and exciting field of resources; but can be potentially confusing for an apprentice researcher. There is also the risk of losing theoretical coherence, and therefore academic rigour, when combining methods which draw on different theoretical assumptions. To minimise this risk, I have tried to use analytic tools reflexively, identifying their theoretical provenance and considering their relevance for the post-structuralist concepts discussed in the earlier chapters of this study.

The handling of emotion is also potentially challenging for a discourse analysis researcher. It is argued (Wetherell, 2001b) that the expression of emotion is always mediated by cultural conventions, and therefore, discourse analysis does not attempt to uncover mental states. At first I found that, when faced with ‘emotionally charged’ data, the temptation to comment on - or simply to acknowledge - people’s feelings can be difficult to avoid. Consider, for example, the following short extract from my data:

I think it will be one of the experiences that I never really forget. It was horrible.

As discussed in chapter 3, critics of discourse analysis find the lack of attention to mental states problematic. Accordingly, a number of researchers combine elements of both discursive and psychoanalytic traditions. For example, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) have developed a psychosocial approach - free association narrative enquiry - to analyse talk. Combined with an awareness of how discourse influences the subject positions available to people, this method opens up additional possibilities for understanding motivation, and explaining why people sometimes follow a course of action which appears to have no advantage for them. They interrogate the data for evidence which reveals the subject's 'psychosocial reality', for example attributing a man's illness to long-term conflicts arising from his unconscious (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005). I consider, however, that the advantages of a psychosocial approach are outweighed by the ethical implications raised. In her critique of this method, Wetherell (2005:171) argues that in drawing conclusions, the researchers do not take sufficient account of 'the pressure the interviews place on [the interviewee] ... to offer a satisfactory account of who he is and the kind of attributional work [required]'. There are also difficult ethical questions about diagnosing 'character'; Wetherell (2003:113) suggests that making claims on the basis of a psychoanalytic reading of a person's situation 'assumes more omnipotent authority' than a discursive investigation. I would go further and suggest that the research participant, unlike a patient undergoing psychoanalytic therapy, does not expect their story to be used to uncover their unconscious motivations and weaknesses. In therapy, it is explicit that the patient is there to seek help with a problem. The therapist is trained and qualified in psychoanalytic theory and techniques, and continues to receive supervision from another qualified analyst. None of this is guaranteed in the research situation.

Discourse analysts have made a number of accommodations to deal with the issue of mental states. Wetherell (2003:115-116) proposes that the behaviour and characteristics suggested by a psychoanalytic reading could equally be seen as discursive styles or routines which are 'part of the ..."habitus" or "cultural capital" available to the child ... Children learn how to model and become expert in reproducing as appropriate certain psychological languages for representing self and other'. Consequently, Wetherell (2003) has developed the concept of 'personal order' as a discursive alternative to the psychoanalytic concept of psychic constructs. It is important to reiterate, however, that despite these accommodations, discourse analysts avoid making the assumption that talk is a transparent representation of the speaker's 'real' thoughts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Talk is treated as functional, and analysed in the cultural context. Speculation on a person's feelings or mental states does not form part of discourse analysis, although the speaker's talk about emotion might be examined as a resource for constructing a discursive position. I follow this approach in order to preserve the integrity of the method, which precludes discussions about the participants' feelings, attitudes or mental states, and focusses instead on the identity work performed by talk in the interview context.

Finally, this form of discourse analysis takes a distinctive approach to biographical data. Biographical categories are analysed in terms of the resources they offer for identity construction, but - as Wetherell, Edley, Taylor and Littleton all emphasise - participants' biographical details should not be used to generate claims about individuals or categories such as gender and class. This flows from the premise that talk is not taken to be referential or 'true'; the method, therefore, explores 'identity work *in talk* rather than assuming that the talk is in some way an expression of other pre-existing identities, such as class or ethnicity' (Taylor and Littleton, 2008:291). For this reason, Taylor and Littleton avoid the

use of pseudonyms (which carry certain connotations) when presenting data, identifying participants as ‘Speaker A’, ‘B’ and so on. After consideration, I decided to follow Edley’s and Wetherell’s practice of using pseudonyms; this makes the report easier to read, and acknowledges that, while individuals are not the focus of analysis, the participants are people with their own biographies.

## **6.6 Searching for patterns**

Analysis has been ongoing, following Finch and Mason’s advice (1990, cited in The Open University, 2005) that it is useful to begin analysis and interpretation at an early stage. This begins with transcription, following Lapadat and Lindsay’s (1999:82) proposal that:

[analysis] takes place and understandings are derived through the process of constructing a transcript by listening and re-listening, viewing and re-viewing. We think that transcription facilitates the close attention and the interpretive thinking that is needed to make sense of the data.

Certainly, the lengthy process of listening, note-making and transcription engendered my familiarity with the data as a whole. As with other forms of qualitative interviewing, transcription is followed by a process of coding: this involved applying the analytic concepts discussed earlier. The idea is to identify patterns - commonalities and variations - in the data. This is a subjective process: the general advice in discourse analysis may be to begin by being ‘open to the text’ (Clarke, 2000b:114) and avoid looking for pre-determined themes; but eventually, the researcher has to decide what constitutes a pattern, which patterns are prominent, and how to interpret them.

In forms of discourse analysis which look for patterns between speakers, it is important to examine the data across a sample, rather than confining the analysis to each transcript in



turn. I began by simply reading all the transcripts, marking sections which struck me as interesting or significant. I followed this with more focused reading to identify potential interpretative repertoires, subject positions and ideological dilemmas. Then, I created a table of all the interpretative repertoires which appeared across the sample, enabling me to identify patterns (Appendix 9). I made several more readings using the additional analytic concepts, discussed above, to enrich the analysis and interrogate aspects of the data that remained challenging. Throughout the readings, whenever I identified commonly recurring topics, such as ‘being a student’, I copied relevant extracts into a new document. This facilitated a detailed and focused analysis of selected sections of data.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented an overview of discourse analysis, and shown how I went about selecting particular approaches relevant both for my research questions and my theoretical framework. Discourse analysis is a well established approach which offers a rich and flexible resource for studying identity. I have also noted some potential difficulties. I will build on this overview as I discuss the interview data in the next part of the thesis. The analysis begins, in chapter 7, with an exploration of how social work education impacts on students’ identities. This leads me to examine the relationship between the professional and the personal, in chapter 8. Finally, in chapter 9, I consider the impact of social work registration on identity construction.

## **Part 3**

### **Analysis and interpretation of the data**

## **Chapter 7**

### **Social work education: gains and challenges in students' identity work**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In earlier chapters I argued that registration and social work education are interlinked. First, therefore, I want to explore how students construct their identities in relation to social work education more broadly. Two of the research questions are particularly relevant here. What discourses do students draw on when talking about social work education? And what discourses do they draw on to construct their identities in private life and as developing professionals? The semi-structured interviews generated a variety of patterns in students' talk, which I analyse in terms of the resources described in the previous chapter: interpretative repertoires; local resources; the concepts of trouble and its repair; subject positions and positioning; ideological dilemmas; rhetorical strategies and accounting practices.

In presenting the data, I try to provide enough detail for the analysis to be 'open to scrutiny and criticism' (Taylor, 2001:42), while condensing it sufficiently to allow a reasonable quantity to be analysed. In keeping with the conventions of my adopted approach, most of the extracts are lengthy. I have only included the interviewer's words where they illuminate the speaker's response, but Appendix 10 provides an example of how both the interviewer's and participant's talk was transcribed and included in the analysis. It is usual to present a sequence of several extracts, and then analyse the patterns found across them.

Biographical data, as discussed in chapter 6, is treated as a 'local resource' rather than to make claims on the basis of particular social categories. In this respect, it will be useful to

clarify that all seven participants were sponsored by their employer. Three were men and four were women. Their ages ranged from the late '20s to early '50s; two people had migrated to the UK, including one Black participant, and the others were White British. Three students described their family backgrounds as either working class or economically disadvantaged.

## **7.2 A note about transcription**

Lapadat and Lindsay (1999:82) argue that choices about transcription reflect the researcher's decisions about how 'reality' should be treated, as well as 'the relationships between talk and meaning, and the place of the researcher in this interpretive process'. I found the adapted 'Jeffersonian' style of transcription, used by Wetherell, Taylor and Edley, quite daunting to undertake. In any case, it has been developed for conversation analysis rather than the more eclectic approach taken in my research. My solution was to use a simplified form of Gee's (1986) method, which has the advantage of preserving the speaker's rhythm with minimal use of unfamiliar symbols. This form of transcription is usually employed to analyse the linguistic structure of narratives, but I find it appropriate and evocative. Unlike the Jeffersonian method, my transcription omits details such as the length of pauses and overlapping speech. Instead, the end of each line signifies a pause in speech. Punctuation is kept to a minimum, to avoid compromising the speech rhythm. The symbol [...] indicates that several lines have been cut, whereas three dots (without the square brackets) shows a shorter omission. Words or phrases placed within square brackets [thus] have been added for the sake of clarity.

### **7.3 Enrichment and challenge**

Data about the implications of social work education emerged at various points in the interview, as students took up and developed their own themes in response to the scheduled topics (Appendix 6). Chapter 6 provides illustrations of interpretative repertoires from this section of the data: students talk about social work education as an opportunity, but it also requires a significant commitment of their time and energy; in addition it is presented as a process of continual scrutiny and self-monitoring. Although the pace and practical demands of the curriculum provide useful contextual information, they are not the focus of my research. There are three interpretative repertoires of particular interest here. In the first and second repertoires respectively, students talk about social work education as a source of personal growth and professional development. The third repertoire, on the other hand, represents social work education as a challenge to established identities.

#### *7.3.1 Personal growth*

The first stage of discourse analysis involves searching for patterns in the data. The notion of 'personal growth' emerged as a common feature across the transcripts.

#### Extract 1

Fran:

1. Well I keep hearing the term 'professional identity' ...
2. So
3. What do you think it is
4. ... How is it different from personal identity?

The speaker responds by addressing the subject of professional identity at some length, and after a brief pause turns to personal identity.

Olanna:

5. In your thinking
6. You're a social worker
7. In the way you perceive
8. The way I view things now
- [...]
9. Your understanding
10. Knowledge
11. You have gained as a social worker
12. Rubs on
13. In your personal life as well
14. Even though
15. It's your personal identity
16. Your thinking
17. Has changed
18. From your learning
- [...]
19. What I gain from [she names one of the early social work modules] was
20. To live with my own issues
21. To live with my prejudices
22. To live with the way I look at people
- [...]

23. That's what I gain from it

24. That's why I love the training

Fran:

25. Yes

Olanna:

26. I love what I gain from it

27. I love it.

The speaker constructs social work education almost as life-changing, positioning herself as an enthusiastic student. Lines 20 – 22 initially appear to suggest that the speaker has certain difficulties. However, these lines need to be considered in the broader context of the social work education curriculum which includes a pedagogical concern with developing self-awareness, and so I treat this as a local resource. The next speaker draws on the personal growth repertoire in describing his first practice learning placement as 'a completely new environment', which he found both challenging and affirming.

### Extract 2

Jak:

1. I guess it was ... the raw nature
2. Of the issues that were dealt with
3. ... Which was really good, really good
4. It kind of confirmed to me that
5. This is where I want to be.

The next extract comes towards the end of an interview when the speaker steers the discussion back to professional identity:

Extract 3

Pete:

1. ... One thing we haven't spoken about specifically is maybe um
2. You know some sort of the values really
3. And uh
- [...]
4. You know I do feel that that's a big part of
5. Me considering myself a professional now is kind of the grounding in the
6. Um
7. You know the beliefs of you know the bigger picture really in terms of the
8. You know
9. Helping a
10. You know
11. Sort of disadvantaged people
- [...]
12. You know I think it's quite important to me
13. You know as a professional now
- [...]
14. Something I suppose which I've developed through the course
- [...]
15. Yeah I suppose social work has given me the opportunity to sort of explore professionally what



16. You know I believe personally.

A similar emphasis on values is expressed by the next speaker:

Extract 4

Tom:

1. And being on the course
2. Encourages you to
3. Er
4. Explore your personal beliefs
5. And your own sense of what's right and wrong.

Despite variations, there is a pattern in speakers' references to the personal gains derived from their social work learning. In extract 1, the gain is presented as a changed way of thinking; in the others it is a discovery and consolidation of values. In placing importance on values, students implicitly draw on the GSCC codes and occupational standards (chapter 4), in constructing the identity of a professional social worker.

*7.3.2 Professional development*

As a variation on the personal growth repertoire, some sections of data place greater emphasis on professional development. The following extracts arise from participants' comparisons between their previous unqualified roles and their learning as students.

Extract 5

Lynne:

1. You realise what you're doing more
2. You're thinking about what you're doing
3. It sort of brings it home to you a bit more.

Extract 6

Joanne:

1. And I've just found the law particularly absolutely fascinating
2. In terms of what underpins
3. What we do as workers
4. And
5. So that's the bit about the student that I've found
6. So much better really.

In chapter 4 I argued that the discursive meanings associated with professionalism, transmitted through both the curriculum and the workplace, act as a resource for constructing professional identity. The 'traits' of autonomy and expertise are evident in the way participants talk about their learning.

Extract 7

Olanna:

1. At this third level
2. We're expected to practice professionally
3. With greater autonomy

4. So ... I feel like I'm a professional social worker
5. Because I'm given a high
6. I can say a very high degree of autonomy.

Extract 8

Pete:

1. You know, the grounding in the theory and the knowledge that I've picked up
2. And also individually the confidence to be able to talk about those things
3. ... I know that I've got that
4. Grounding now to give sort of opinions some sort of backing.

The second stage of discourse analysis involves looking at the function and consequences of speakers' talk. Taking the personal growth and professional development repertoires together, a sense of enjoyment and discovery runs through the extracts above. Students draw on these two repertoires to represent their learning as progress: not just a mastery of knowledge, but a transformation of their professional and (in some cases) their personal lives for the better. What purpose does this kind of talk serve? I suggest that the participants, all in their final year of study except for Joanne, are constructing a particular version of their identities as 'successful students' and 'almost qualified' professionals. The speakers in extracts 5 and 6 are more pragmatic with their choice of examples, but nevertheless adopt the position of enthusiastic and successful students.

Certain discursive resources can also give rise to trouble (Taylor and Littleton, 2006). In the next section, a contrasting repertoire emerges when participants express difficulties in reconciling the student role with their histories as experienced workers.

### *7.3.3 Identity Trouble*

Social work students spend half the curriculum on extended 'practice learning opportunities' (assessed work placements), during which they perform increasingly complex tasks under the supervision of a qualified 'practice assessor'. As sponsored mature students, however, the participants had already had several years of related experience. The next four extracts show a pattern in participants' claims that they are not 'typical' students:

#### Extract 9

Olanna:

1. Even though I'm a student
2. The level of my work is far above a student
3. I'm not saying that with pride
4. But I'm interested in this work
5. I love it
6. I enjoy it
7. And I put everything in it.

The next observation comes towards the end of an interview, when the speaker turns to the topic of 'mature students':

#### Extract 10

Lynne:

1. Yes that's one thing about being a student
2. You know when you're mature

3. You put yourself down as a student social worker
4. Or you introduce yourself as a student social worker
5. You almost have to qualify yourself by saying I may be a student but I've been around for a long time
6. I've been in the job for a long time.

In extract 11, the speaker talks about being mistaken for a qualified social worker, because of her age and experience:

Extract 11

Joanne:

1. I was going to meetings at quite a high level  
[...]
2. People assumed
3. You know, that I was a senior social worker  
[...]
4. And part of that was, you know
5. People just being surprised
6. And because I'm a bit older and
7. They probably think of students as a lot younger.

As well as showing a pattern, these extracts illustrate the analytic concept of trouble. Here, participants' prior positioning, as experienced and competent workers, is inconsistent with their new positioning as students. To construct the student role, participants draw on interpretative repertoires which hold students to be young, inexperienced and not yet

competent. This subject position is out of step with their actual age and experience. To repair the trouble, they engage in rhetorical strategies. In extract 9, for instance, the speaker accounts for her exceptionality by emphasising her high level of competence, commitment and effort. Later in the same interview, the speaker in extract 11 describes how she deliberately dressed down - 'like a student' - to clarify her status. This particular narrative resonates with Costello's (2004:139) observation that 'the ... often painful road to the adoption of a professional identity' showed itself in [students'] attempts to either 'appear professional' (2004:149), or 'be themselves' (2004:151) through their dress style. The difficulty of adjusting to a perceived student role is well documented in the research literature about non-traditional students, discussed in chapter 3.

In the next extract, the speaker's identity is also troubled by the discrepancy between her previous and new subject positions; but an additional, and initially puzzling, kind of trouble is raised. The speaker responds very briefly to my enquiry about her new job - which, she explained, was in a newly formed multi-agency team rather than a traditional social work agency - and then takes me by surprise with an apparent non-sequitor (line 8):

#### Extract 12

Fran:

1. And how do you view yourself
2. In terms of social work
3. Is it
4. Like
5. Do you feel you're a social worker or something different?

Angie:

6. Um
7. No it's new isn't it?
8. I hated being a student
9. Which really surprised me cos
10. I thought
11. I would just like that experience of being a student
12. And using it as a learning experience
13. I thought that would be really
14. Good and really interesting
15. And I hated it

Fran:

16. Ohh

Angie:

[...]

17. I had two really good um
18. Learning opportunities
19. Two really good practice teachers
20. You know
21. Everything was
22. There was no problems at all
23. The problem was just with me
24. Because I found it really hard
25. Going from a position of
26. Relative responsibility I mean not like massive responsibility

- 27. But relative responsibility
- 28. To a position where
- 29. Um
- 30. Er
- 31. Which didn't have any responsibility.

This speaker's transcript repeatedly acts as an 'exception' which did not conform with patterns found elsewhere in the data. Taylor and Littleton (2006) suggest that exceptions should alert the analyst to look for additional discursive resources that may be in use. The speaker's assertion that she hated being a student is unexpected because it runs counter to the flow of conversation. She recognises that her response has troubled the interaction, and attempts to make repair by re-positioning her statement within a discourse about 'learning'. This enables her to present a subject position, as someone who values learning, which fits more appropriately within the interview context. When the interviewer nevertheless expresses surprise (line 16), the speaker engages in further repair strategies; according to Taylor and Littleton (2006), repeated explanations are a typical response to trouble. There were many other occasions on which this speaker's transcript puzzled me; on reflection, I suggest that this data illustrates resistance to the professional discourses which shape social work education. I will explore this idea further in chapter 9.

A differently troubled student identity is presented by two male participants, focused around their age (late twenties) and childlessness.



Extract 13

Jak:

1. Because I do look young
2. I keep harping on about that
- [...]
3. There are some times when they say it ['you look so young'] and you know it's just them being nice
4. And there are some times when they're saying it and you can feel the undertones
5. And there's almost a bog-standard reaction from me now
6. Sometimes
7. If I know there's an undertone
8. I'll actually say something along the line of
9. You know
10. Well I have actually worked for [the employer] for eight years
11. In various different capacities
12. Does my age bother you
13. Because if it does I'm quite happy to go back to my manager and ask for another worker if you aren't comfortable
14. Which you know
15. Sounds a bit mean but I think with some of them
16. It sounds a bit awful doesn't it.

Extract 14

Tom:

1. When I work with families people ask me if I have children

2. How old I am that kind of thing

Fran:

3. Right

[...]

Tom:

4. I don't know what they expect me to say
5. If I say yes I have children
6. Does that help
7. Does that help me be a better social worker

Fran:

8. Yes

Tom:

9. If I don't have children
10. Does that mean I don't know anything about social work?

Unlike the women, these two younger (male) participants do not refer to themselves as 'atypical' students; nevertheless, their endeavour to construct themselves as competent professionals is undermined by the way they are positioned by others. However, instead of accounting for their student status (as the women do), the speakers have to account for being 'young' and 'not being a parent'. Although, in discourse analysis, biographical details are only considered in relation to the resources they offer for identity construction (Taylor and Littleton, 2006), it is hard to ignore the possibly gendered nature of 'trouble' suggested by this analysis of the student role. The differences are not necessarily attributable to gender, however, because the male participants were much younger, on average, than the female participants.

A further aspect of troubled positioning, evident across several transcripts, related to a recurring pattern of changes in the participants' relationships with friends and family. In the first extract, the speaker talks about her attempt to apply insights from social work learning to her role as a parent:

Extract 15

Olanna:

1. So I have to be able to use my knowledge
2. To listen to my children
3. Listening's important
4. Which we Xian<sup>9</sup> parents don't usually have
5. Usually our husbands, they are
6. 'No no, no child must talk'
7. You have to let children talk
8. 'Don't bring a social worker into the house'
9. Ok
10. After he's gone out
11. We start to talk.

The next speaker explains how she concealed her decision to resume her social work studies after recovering from a serious illness:

---

<sup>9</sup> I have used 'X' to avoid revealing the speaker's country of origin

Extract 16

Joanne:

1. I wasn't really telling a lot of people
2. ... That I'd gone back to studying
3. Um
4. And that was a lot to do with my health
5. And people didn't think I should even be working never mind studying.

Later, the same speaker presents an account of what happened when she was investigated by the GSCC:

Extract 17

Joanne:

1. Of course you know, my husband
2. ... Even he – couldn't really understand
3. He of course 'oh well, you don't need that. You don't need this job anyway'
4. So I think it was difficult you know.

These two speakers, for different reasons, refer to their partners' and friends' disapproval or dismissal of their career choices. For the purpose of the analysis, we don't need to know how 'genuine' this perception is. The point is that it is a recurring pattern, in which social work is presented as having different meanings for the students and their partners. The speakers are thus faced with ideological dilemmas (chapter 6); having to reconcile culturally opposed interpretative repertoires about child-rearing (extract 15) and women's

work (extract 17). A further instance is seen in the next extract, in which the speaker reveals his siblings' response to his decision to become a social worker:

Extract 18

Jak:

1. I mean, I'm gay
2. And um coming out to my brother and sister was easy
3. Compared with telling them I was going to be a social worker
4. That was actually harder

Fran:

5. Yeah

Jak:

6. To tell them that by the way, I've gone on to a training course
7. And this is what I'm going to do for a career
8. Um, I remember my sister referred to it as joining the dark side.

The speaker's comparison between 'coming out as a gay man' and 'telling his brother and sister he is going to be a social worker' draws on a well-established repertoire that 'coming out' is a difficult personal disclosure which risks hostility and rejection by others (McNaron, 2002). This is used as a dramatic rhetorical device, as is the reference to 'joining the dark side'<sup>10</sup> (line 8), inferring that the speaker's siblings - who, we have been told a little earlier in the interview, are in local authority care - depict social workers as the enemy. In constructing their identities, all three speakers raise different kinds of trouble; what they have in common is the use of personal experience as a local resource, to conjure

---

<sup>10</sup> A reference from popular culture: the *Star Wars* films.

up a sense of working against the grain of family expectations. In the final extract, the speaker considers my question about whether professional and personal identity are the same or different.

Extract 19

Tom:

1. I get criticised ...
2. By some of my friends for being too
3. Er you know
4. Like a social worker
5. That's what they say to me you know
6. My brother often says to me 'oh you're a typical social worker'
7. Because I have a view about something which he
8. He wouldn't have had
- [...]
9. There's a stereotype about social workers isn't there that they're left-wing and you  
know er
10. Too liberal about things but
11. And other people think that's what I'm like
12. Sometimes as well but
13. I'm not always like that but
14. But er
15. People have an image of me
16. You know
- [...]

17. Sometimes I don't get my friends
18. Sometimes we don't
19. You know
20. We can talk about football
21. We can talk about you know
22. Music
23. But then other issues
24. You know world issues
25. We just don't talk about because we can't
- [...]
26. We're poles apart.

There is a sense, here, of the speaker defining his identity in opposition to 'others', in this case his brother and his friends. We cannot know whether there has been a change in the speaker's 'views about things'. The point is that, in constructing the relationship between his personal and professional identity, the speaker draws attention to being positioned by others as a 'typical social worker'. Despite very different contextual circumstances, the occurrence of trouble is remarkably consistent across these four transcripts. In presenting their student identities, the participants suggest that 'becoming a social worker' challenges their existing relationships with people they are close to.

#### **7.4 Discussion**

I have discussed three interpretative repertoires about the impact of social work education on students' identities. These show students presenting social work education as both enriching and challenging. Recalling the argument (chapter 3) that people seek to construct

a coherent narrative identity, the analytic concept of trouble reveals the identity work that takes place when inconsistencies disturb the continuity of participants' self-construction. In particular, their identities as students, expressed in positive terms most of the time, are troubled on two counts. They don't identify with their own or others' perceived idea of a 'typical' student; and they find themselves misunderstood, and in some cases mistrusted, by family and friends.

In arguing that the extracts show students constructing a particular version of their identities in the interview, it is important to acknowledge the effect of the context. As I had been transparent about my role as a lecturer and manager on the Social Work Programme, this may have increased participants' wish to present a positive professional identity. Like the people in Wetherell and Edley's study (1999:352), they were:

... engaged in accomplishing a wide variety of identity positions. They were simultaneously constructing themselves as reasonable human beings, as individuals with certain reputations and histories and (usually) as co-operative and willing research subjects.

On the other hand, we saw in chapter 3 that Taylor (2006) offers another perspective, arguing that social work practitioners construct a particular version of professional identity in the reflective writing that they submit for assessment and supervision. Almost certainly, therefore, participants had had many previous opportunities to 'rehearse' their professional identities. This is not to say that they were presenting a 'false' or deliberately contrived identity in the interview, but rather that it was a particular and constructed one. I suggest that, like other sites of self-reflection, the interviews acted as an opportunity for students to



employ technologies of the self: the actions people take to transform themselves into a particular kind of person (chapter 3).

This form of analysis is underpinned by the theory that discourses create and regulate the meanings and practices which can be produced in society (not only language). Unlike conversation analysis, therefore, it is usual to take account of external frames of reference when analysing transcripts. Wenger's work on communities of practice is especially relevant to the challenges reported in students' talk. The analysis supports the idea that social work students, through their status as peripheral participants in the professional community, are learning to engage as full members. Equally illuminating is Wenger's argument that 'sustaining an identity across boundaries is one of the most delicate challenges' (1998:154) because not only are peripheral participants less secure in the new practices and discourses, but also because they are simultaneously maintaining (and renegotiating) their existing, more established identities.

The research literature on higher education (chapter 3) suggests that social work students are not unique in expressing a tension between 'enrichment' and 'challenges to identity'. The issue of troubled relationships with family and friends, for example, is consistent with the findings of Johnson and Robson (1999), Kevern and Webb (2004) and Nel (2006), discussed in chapter 3. An additional factor working against the participants in the present study, however, may be related to the particular media and political context pertaining at the time. The interviews were carried out between April and October 2009, in the wake of the 'Baby P' investigation in Haringey during late 2008, in which a young child's death was attributed largely to the shortcomings of the social work department. The media - particularly the tabloid press - presented very negative images of social workers during this

period (Lombard, 2008). Although not included here, the data suggests that participants were exposed to debates about the failings of social workers, both in the workplace and elsewhere. Indeed, one student considered that his 'sense of accountability' was 'heightened by the current climate'; recounting that a young service user had blamed him for Baby P's death ('I can't believe you let that happen'). A second student observed, 'we are getting into a bit of a maligned profession at the moment'.

An issue not explored here, is how wider discourses about gender, age and cultural difference might influence participants' depiction of their social work studies. The sample is not large enough to generalise from; and in any case, this form of discourse analysis does not use biographical details to generate claims about social categories.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has gone some way towards exploring the research questions about the discourses (in the sense of interpretative repertoires) that students draw on when talking about social work education, and in constructing their identities in private life and as developing professionals. In chapter 3, I considered the argument that educational programmes are intended to bring about changes in the self. Taking the three interpretative repertoires together, this data supports the idea that learning to be a social worker is not just about developing a professional identity, but has an impact on personal identity too. There are both gains and losses: in order to be successful in their professional training, students must take on particular values and ways of thinking; but this may entail giving up aspects of previous identities. Although the methodology and the small size of this study preclude generalisation, the data is consistent with findings from other research into non-traditional and professional education students. The difference, to be considered in chapter

9, is that, for students in the present study, these identity challenges must take place in the relatively new context of social work registration. As a further step in my argument, the next chapter explores the extent to which students align their personal and professional identities.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Constructing the relationship between personal and professional identities**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

The advent of professional registration for social work students has blurred the boundary between personal and professional identity: does this matter? As social work students progress towards qualifying, do they perceive any consequences for their personal lives? This is the research question to be considered, as I examine the data which shows students exploring the distinction between personal and professional identity.

Chapter 4 argued that social work professional identity can be conceptualised as a collective resource with special characteristics and values, or as an occupational description which enables comparison with other professions. Or, it can be thought of subjectively, as one of the many identities that a person comes to inhabit. All these meanings come into play when students talk about being a professional social worker.

#### **8.2 Interpretative repertoires: constructing the boundary**

The GSCC Codes of Practice require students to conduct themselves ‘suitably’ in both professional and private life, so it is relevant to explore how students perceive the distinction. I asked participants for their thoughts on ‘professional identity and personal identity, and what these mean for you’, and whether they saw professional identity as ‘part of your personal identity, or separate’. Three interpretative repertoires emerged from the data. The first, which I call ‘work-life balance’, emphasises the advantage of placing a clear boundary between work and personal life; this is commonly advocated in self-help and management texts about working practices. The second interpretative repertoire -

‘professional boundaries’ - utilises the idea that, for ethical reasons, social workers should maintain a separation between their personal and professional lives. This is closely linked with one of the traits espoused in the professionalism discourse (chapter 4). I have labelled the third repertoire ‘congruence’ - a term borrowed from the counselling literature - to convey a sense of alignment between a social worker’s personal and professional beliefs and values. As I will discuss, the second and third repertoires reflect current but potentially conflicting discourses in the social work literature (Doel et al., 2009). In practice, most participants draw on a combination of repertoires, but I will begin by considering each one in turn. As always, the influence of the interview context needs to be recognised: the participants may wish to convey a ‘textbook’ sense of professionalism, drawing on previous identities which have been offered up for supervision and assessment during their social work course.

#### *8.2.1 Work-life balance: ‘that’s work, and that’s out of work’*

In some instances, a clear separation is made between work and personal life, which can be talked about in terms of the individual’s qualities and characteristics:

##### Extract 1

Jak:

1. My professional identity is very different to my personal identity
2. ... I’m a little chaotic at home
- [...]
3. And ... at work I’m renowned for my desk being anally tidy
4. And I’m organised and
5. My diary’s permanently in my hand.

In the next extract, the separation between work and personal life is presented in terms of a healthy work-life balance:

Extract 2

Pete:

1. I suppose I've always since I've worked in social care tried to separate
2. Sort of work and not work
3. In the sense that I don't want to take any of the stress and pressure
4. From work back home

Fran:

5. Mmm

Pete

6. Um
7. I suppose that's just how I cope with
8. With the working week really

Fran:

9. Yeah

Pete:

10. Is that come the hour that I finish each day
11. I find that I am able to switch off really and just
12. Get home and
13. And not worry too much
14. Or even talk about
15. You know, the day at work that I've had.

A number of analytic and rhetorical devices are of interest here. In both extracts, the speakers draw on previous versions of identity (Taylor and Littleton, 2006) as a local resource. The speaker in extract 2 begins by positioning himself in relation to the work-life balance repertoire. After the first four lines, the positioning becomes tentative and ambiguous; the phrases 'how I cope' and 'not worry too much' hint at some kind of 'trouble'. The listener might infer that the speaker has some kind of stress-related difficulty; this is potentially problematic in terms of professional suitability. Alternatively it might be taken that coping with stress is a sensible strategy for achieving work-life balance. It is important to recall that assumptions about people's mental states are avoided in discourse analysis, so the focus here is on the discursive positioning. In retrospect, the speaker may have been trying to gauge my reaction to the position he later adopts, as someone who has overcome a mental health problem. An equally plausible reading is that, despite my routine clarification that I had no prior knowledge about participants, the speaker suspects I already know about his past. Immediately afterwards, he continues:

Extract 3

Pete:

1. In terms of my identity I do
2. I do see them quite separately
3. ... That's my work
4. And that's out of work I guess
- [...]
5. I wouldn't at home want to consider myself a social worker.

Drawing on the work-life balance repertoire, extracts 1 – 3 suggest that some students think of professional and personal identity as quite distinct from one another. This raises a question about the implications of eroding this boundary when students are learning to cope with a very stressful occupation.

### *8.2.2 Professional boundaries: ‘how much can be revealed about oneself’?*

A separation between personal and professional life can also be conceptualised as a matter of ethical importance and observing professional boundaries. Although there is no universal definition of ‘professional boundary’ (Doel, 2009: 9), in social work education texts (for example, Seden, 2011), it commonly involves not stepping outside the professional role (however defined), and avoiding disclosures about personal life. These meanings are linked with more general discourses of professionalism, seen in the following extract, where a student describes her work with a child’s estranged father:

#### Extract 4:

Olanna:

1. I was able to display my professionalism
2. ... And form a working relationship with the man
3. ... But I have my line
4. Which I have to draw
5. ....I don’t use my private mobile to text him
6. .... I will borrow one of the manager’s mobile phones
7. ... And there’s no phone calls outside office hours.



In the next two extracts, speakers discuss the steps they take to avoid inappropriate disclosures about personal life. The first speaker has just described himself as ‘white British, male, gay’, and continues:

Extract 5

Jak:

1. When I was working in the older people’s team
2. ... I was challenged by
3. An older gentleman who
4. Asked me if I was [gay]
5. And that was particularly difficult
6. Because I knew he was [gay]
7. ... So yes, it was kind of
8. Wanting to disclose something about myself
9. My personal life
10. To actually influence my professional life
11. Um
12. But I think there are ways of letting him know without

Fran:

13. Yes

Jak:

14. It was quite difficult.

Extract 6

Tom:

1. And one family
2. I think they realised that
3. I was
4. Um
5. From the same part of the world as them
6. ... So they were very interested in that

Fran

7. Right

Tom:

8. Ooh he's a [inhabitant from that area]
9. Er
10. And that was
11. They were
12. Asking me questions about that
13. And I found that difficult
14. Because I don't like to get too
15. Too involved

Fran

16. Yes

Tom:

17. I like to
18. Do my job
19. But then

20. You can reveal a few things about yourself

21. I guess can't you

22. Without it being too

23. Difficult

24. Um

25. But I've had to kind of learn over the last few years

26. How much is safe to reveal about yourself

Fran:

27. Mmm

Tom:

28. I guess

29. I haven't fully worked that out but I'm working on it.

In constructing their professional identities, both speakers do rhetorical work to repair trouble. The professional boundaries repertoire requires them to place an 'ethical' distance between themselves and the service users, and they find this problematic. Competing interpretative repertoires are at play here, because despite the emphasis on 'use of self' in social work education (chapter 4), personal disclosure is a contended issue in text books and practice guidance (Doel et al., 2009); some writers discourage it in any form. The trouble that occurs, when students draw on this repertoire, suggests that maintaining the boundary between personal and professional identity can raise uncertainty about how much of one's private self can be revealed. Nevertheless, both the work-life balance and the professional boundaries repertoires construct a relatively clear line between personal and professional identity; this is not the only way, however, of representing this relationship.

8.2.3 *Congruence: 'it's difficult to separate'*

The next two extracts present data which shows how the congruence repertoire is used to construct a fluid relationship between personal and professional identity.

Extract 7

Joanne

1. I think that there are aspects of my personal identity that I hope are in my professional identity in terms of um
2. The way I conduct myself with people
3. And
4. I suppose the image that I give to people. I don't think that would be different in my personal and my professional identity.

Extract 8

Fran:

1. So do you think
2. That professional identity is something different from personal identity
3. Would you say

Tom:

4. I think it's linked
5. Because I
- [...]
6. Have personal beliefs
7. Which are linked to
8. My work in social work

## Chapter 8: Constructing the relationship between personal and professional identities.

9. You know
10. So
11. You know I am quite genuine when I
12. Believe in
13. You know um
14. Being respectful to people
15. You know, that kind of thing
16. Um
17. I
18. I don't do one thing in my work and then do another when I go home you know.

In extracts 7 and 8, the speakers convey a close connection between their personal and professional identities, in the sense that they hold appropriate priorities and values in both respects. The next extract presents the connection in terms of the profound change that social work has introduced into the speaker's personal and family life. The impression given is that her professional and personal identities are almost indistinguishable.

### Extract 9

Olanna:

1. Social work
2. It's difficult to separate because it just change your whole being
3. You always want to help people
4. You know
5. As much as you can
6. Even when I'm listening to my own children

Fran:

7. Right

Olanna:

8. I kind of

9. My knowledge

10. My learning

11. And my professional

12. I have to use it at home as well

[...]

13. Not putting on the hat of a social worker but using my knowledge

Fran:

14. Mmm

Olanna:

15. Relating to them and listening to their problems.

The speaker's positive professional identity becomes threatened a little later in the interview, when her use of the congruence repertoire contradicts with the (implicit) professional boundaries one. The student recounts that her supervisor had admonished her for expressing her personal views to a young teenager who had had a very late abortion. She repairs this trouble in reporting her subsequent conversation with the teenage girl:

#### Extract 10

Olanna:

1. I wasn't judging you

2. I was just

3. You know
4. Feel that maybe the mother's instincts kicked in there
- [...]
5. If you were my child
6. I wouldn't let you do that
7. That's what I meant.

Here we see the speaker having to account for her behaviour (the disclaimer in line 1, followed by offering 'maternal instinct' as a justification).

In other instances, the alignment of identities is presented as an inevitable - although not necessarily positive - consequence of the transition to being a professional or qualified social worker:

Extract 11

Tom:

1. I realised that I had a
2. A huge amount of responsibility ...
3. Because
4. If ... something went wrong
5. You know
6. I was largely responsible
- [...]
7. I felt professionally responsible but also kind of
8. Er

9. Personally responsible

[...]

10. I'd never used to think about

11. Work when I went home until then.

In constructing the relationship between personal and professional identity, the congruence repertoire is the most frequently drawn on. This might indicate that the merging of these two identities, for the purposes of determining professional suitability, is not experienced as a problem. This picture is complicated, however, because sometimes the same speakers draw on one of the other two repertoires elsewhere in the interview. It is important to recall that, as discussed in chapter 6, discourse analysis is not concerned with seeking out 'truth'; thus consensus 'in the sense that some people are found to *always* use a certain repertoire and certain people another' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:156) is not important. The theoretical assumption is that people draw upon different repertoires according to the context and needs of the situation; consistency, therefore, is achieved by identifying common patterns, including both variability and similarity on the same topic. On the other hand, the use of more than one repertoire, especially where this is presented as troubled, raises the possibility that the speakers are dealing with an ideological dilemma. In the next section I explore this idea.

### **8.3 Dealing with dilemmas**

Although the congruence repertoire is frequently drawn on, when used alongside the other two repertoires, it sometimes gives rise to trouble. The speaker in extract 12 had used his personal history as a local resource, early in the interview, to construct the identity of



someone who can contribute special 'insight' to social work. Now, however, this identity is potentially compromised when he draws on the professional boundaries repertoire:

Extract 12

Jak

1. And I've always worried about
2. Like
3. Whether I was on my own personal crusade

Fran:

4. Mmm

Jak:

5. Becoming a social worker
6. But I don't think I am
- [...]
7. I had a really good [practice assessor] who really did talk to me about those kind of things
8. Um
9. And actually made it safe to talk about those sort of things
10. And I sort of came to terms with
11. Because I was constantly worried
12. That I was doing this for the wrong reasons.

The speaker narrates a dilemma which he has previously rehearsed, and apparently resolved, with his practice supervisor. Nevertheless, in the interview context, the problem resurfaces in the tension between the professional boundaries and the congruence

repertoires. The exploration of the speaker's motives is presented in problematic terms: it is something 'unsafe' to talk about; it needs 'coming to terms with'; it is worrying, and he might be 'doing it for the wrong reasons'. To repair this trouble, he uses a number of accounting strategies (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Emphasising the subject position of learner, the speaker cites the higher authority of his practice assessor who has led him to conclude that his motivations are the 'right' ones after all. I suggest that this dilemma is an ideological one (chapter 6), arising from competing interpretative repertoires. The student's discussions in supervision might, for example, have been informed by a common sense notion of the 'wounded healer' (see Regehr et al., 2001); in this sense, to be on a personal crusade (line 3) is seen as a negative attribute for a social work student. On the other hand, service user perspectives are explicitly valued in the social work curriculum. An additional trouble is that, like the speaker in extract 2, this participant raises a potentially problematic personal history, in relation to professional suitability. Extract 12 also highlights the potential difficulty that students face in achieving the effective 'use of self', in which

... social workers need to be able to witness and support the pain of others, while at the same time not over identifying or projecting their own pain on to the other (Seden, 2011:10).

In the next extract, we see an unusual example of trouble, in which congruence - previously expressed by the same speaker - appears to exclude her past life in another country. Invited to give an example of something in her past that others might view as 'incompatible with being a social worker', the speaker responds:

Extract 13

Olanna:

1. My own time growing up is very different
- [...]
2. Because my own type of
3. Past life we had
4. Is a hard working type of life
5. ... Cos there was no free school in [country] at that time
6. I have to work
7. ... As soon as the school closes
8. Following day you're back to the village
9. To start to work on the farm
10. To get money
- [...]
11. But I didn't bring that into my social work
12. Telling young people they have to go and get a job
13. Their time is different from my time
- [...]
14. I don't usually use my past life in my work because they wouldn't understand it  
(laughs).

There is a sense, here, of the speaker inhabiting two quite separate worlds, and perhaps drawing on a different repertoire to other participants. She cannot use her past - separated geographically and culturally from her present - as a personal resource for her professional identity, because it appears to be incomprehensible in this country.

The speaker in the next extract has already drawn on the congruence repertoire to construct an alignment between his personal and professional values (extract 8), stating that ‘I don’t do one thing in my work and then do another when I go home, you know’. This previous identity, just recently activated in the interview context, troubles the subsequent one:

Extract 14

Tom:

1. I don’t want to go out with my friends on a weekend and be a social worker
2. Because
3. I do want there to be
4. I do want there to be
5. A boundary [he laughs]
- [...]
6. I believe in what I’m doing but I don’t want to
7. I’m not just a social worker

Fran

8. Yes

Tom

9. I’m not just a
10. You know
11. I’m a person with other interests as well.

The speaker’s laugh (line 5) suggests an ideological dilemma, in which he is pulled in different directions by two contrasting interpretative repertoires: work-life balance requires a healthy separation between personal and professional life, whereas congruence

emphasises the alignment of personal and professional values. To preserve a consistent identity he has to engage in accounting work (line 11).

The final extended extract provides a reminder that students are not only negotiating the relationship between personal and professional identity, but are also positioned, as learners, on the boundaries between different communities of practice (chapter 4). Exploring the idea of a personal-professional boundary, the speaker begins by positioning herself in relation to nurses.

Extract 15

Lynne:

1. I think when it comes down to this personal/ professional identity thing
2. I think you have to have more boundaries really
3. ....You know if you're a nurse
4. And somebody
5. Out in the street has a heart attack
6. You'd do something
7. But if you're a social worker and you see somebody begging on the side of the street
8. You walk by

Fran:

9. Yes

Lynne:

10. Because you can't get involved with that can you
11. It's a different sort of boundary there

[...]

12. There was one in [town] in the subway

13. And I looked at him and I thought

14. No he's got that heroin type of colouring you know

[...]

Fran:

15. Is it also to do with what you were saying earlier

16. About the profession being very broad

17. You'd be stopping every five minutes because there's potential situations all around you?

Having stated her initial argument (lines 1 – 8), the speaker follows this with some accounting work to explain why 'a person begging' is different from 'someone having a heart attack'. She engages me in constructing this account (lines 9 - 10); and lines 15 – 17 can be seen as my attempt (as a co-constructor) to strengthen her rationale and repair the potential trouble that her negative allusion to heroin users causes for us both. The extract continues:

Lynne:

18. If I was to meet anybody new

19. Or make friends with anybody

20. And they had mental health problems

21. I wouldn't want to know

22. It sounds horrible

23. It sounds very judgmental

24. But it's not something I want in my private life

Fran:

25. So it's like having to have the boundary isn't it

Lynne:

26. I think it's something you learn.

The attempted clarification in lines 18 – 21 leads to more trouble, which then requires further accounting. The statement in lines 23 – 24 is a rhetorical strategy described by Billig et al. (1988:112-113) as 'credentialling', which enables a speaker to present themselves as a reasonable and rational person; it is used, here, to minimise the risk of being thought 'judgemental'. The word 'but' has a rhetorical dimension, anticipating the speaker's rationale: she wishes to defend her private life. Finally, in line 26, the speaker re-frames her narrative in a learning discourse: making this judgement is not a prejudice, but a social work skill. I suggest that the latter part of this extract illustrates Billig et al.'s argument, discussed in chapter 6, that people's thinking is dilemmatic. Indeed, Billig et al. (1988:112) suggest that the phrase 'I'm not prejudiced but ...' indicates a speaker's awareness of expressing a view which can be countered with a contradictory discourse. It may be that the student's dilemmas reflect conflicting cultural norms and values between the workplace or local community, and the professional community. Furthermore, I suggest, this rhetorical work reflects the speaker's awareness of the power balance between us; she evidently wishes to present an appropriately professional, and non-judgemental, identity.

#### **8.4 Discussion**

In this chapter I have built on the argument, introduced in chapter 7, that learning to be a social worker has an impact on personal identity, as well as professional identity. In this

chapter, I wanted to find out how social work students conceptualise these two kinds of identity, and to what extent they see them as distinct. This is an important step in my investigation of the effect that professional registration has had on students' identities.

The data shows students negotiating different kinds of relationship, through their talk, between their personal and professional identities. Three interpretative repertoires emerged from this section of the data. The work-life balance and the professional boundaries repertoires enable participants to construct a clear distinction between personal and professional identity: in the interests of professionalism, or in terms of a healthy, more rounded, work-life balance. In contrast, the congruence repertoire is used to construct a more fluid relationship, in which personal and professional identities are closely aligned. This repertoire is the most commonly drawn on by participants, often in conjunction with one of the other two. Their talk suggests that they see themselves as people who are 'suited' to social work; integrity between their personal and professional values is especially emphasised. In most cases, individual participants use more than one repertoire; it is evident that they all draw on discourses about professionalism, and in most cases their personal attributes, as resources for constructing their professional identities. It is worth recalling that, in chapter 4, it was discovered that one trait of a professional is to have 'a personal identity that stems from the professional's occupation' (Yam, 2004:979).

The analytic concept of local resources shows how an individual's unique positioning interacts with the wider discursive context. Once again, the concepts of trouble and repair revealed the identity work that took place when inconsistencies disturbed participants' narrative identities. In discourse analysis, it is also important to consider the implications of absences and silences in the data (Carabine, 2001). Extracts 2 and 5 could be



contextualised in the light of prejudice, in care work, against gay and lesbian people and those with mental health histories (Molloy et al., 2003). It is not possible to say whether such discourses impact on these participants' professional identities, although the evidence in the literature suggests they would be likely to play some part. Indeed, a degree of ambivalence towards mental illness is suggested in extract 15.

Summing up, then, participants often drew on contradictory repertoires to talk about the relationship between personal and professional identity. While this was sometimes attributable to the normal fluctuations of the conversational context, at other times it presented participants with an uncomfortable dilemma, which suggests that negotiating a path between personal and professional identity is not easy. In some cases, participants seemed to have difficulty reconciling conflicting advice about professional practice, most noticeably around the issue of self-disclosure. It is likely that this reflects exposure to changes in professional discourse; it is also consistent with Wenger's proposition (1998) that a person's different identities are most likely to conflict when they stand on the periphery of a community of practice.

From a methodological perspective, it is worth reviewing the advantages of the approach so far. It is clear that discourse analysis exposes the nuances of talk. This makes visible the range of difficulties, often subtle and hard to express, faced by students in constructing professional identity. The method provides a detailed examination of the rhetorical strategies that can be used to construct identities; and, unlike conversation analysis (which would involve an even finer examination of the linguistic structure) it is also oriented to the wider discursive context. Certain points need to be borne in mind when interpreting the data. First, this is not the only interpretation that could be made: another researcher might

analyse the same transcripts differently. Furthermore, the interview context, including the characteristics of the interviewer, are likely to have influenced the data. These are not necessarily flaws, but rather, features of discourse analysis. It is nevertheless important to acknowledge and take account of them in reporting and interpreting the data. From a professional perspective, this chapter raises pedagogical issues about the tensions involved in developing professional identity. I will return to these discussions in the concluding chapter.

### **8.5 Conclusion**

Before turning to the final section of data analysis, let me pause to review the arguments that have built up so far. The aim of this study is to investigate, through analysing students' talk, how professional registration affects students' professional and private identities. Registration is closely bound up with social work education: its implications for identity work have to be contextualised in this light, therefore. In the previous chapter, students talked about the impact of social work education (including workplace learning) on their identities. These identities, as we saw in earlier chapters, have been brought closer together under the regulatory gaze of professional registration. Although social work education is experienced as enriching, the analysis so far suggests that students may find their sense of personal identity challenged and de-stabilised as they stand on the boundary of the professional community. Negotiating this boundary to become full members of the community is no easy matter. If these claims have substance, what are the additional implications of professional registration for students' identities? This question was the starting point for my research, and in chapter 9 I examine how students talk about registration.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Professional registration: the impact on students' education, and on their personal and professional identities**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

The introduction of compulsory professional registration has involved major changes for social work education: for students, meeting the regulatory requirements is now an integral part of professional learning. As the regulatory body, the GSCC sets standards for students' professional suitability at the point of selection, and for their conduct throughout their studies; it also monitors the academic curriculum, and the content and quality of practice learning. Students must demonstrate adherence to the broad standards and principles set out in the Codes of Practice, in their written work and assessed practice. They are learning to be a very particular kind of professional: a 'registered social worker', with implications for their private as well as working lives. The analysis, so far, suggests that social work education challenges and de-stabilises students' identities; they have to renegotiate their personal relationships while simultaneously developing a professional identity, and they may struggle to balance personal and professional lives. In this final section of data, I consider the additional implications of registration for students' social work learning and for the construction of personal and professional identities.

I continue to draw on these analytic tools: interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas, the concepts of trouble and repair, and rhetorical strategies such as accounting. Analysing this section of the transcripts, I noticed that the data was highly illustrative of Foucault's theories about the operation and effects of discourse. The interlinked concepts of discursive power, subject positions, governmentality and resistance are used, therefore, as

a resource for organising and interpreting the data in this chapter. This enables me to review these theoretical perspectives, and consider their practical application.

## **9.2 Discursive power: constructing subject positions**

### *9.2.1 Regulated subjects*

Identities are constructed, as we saw in chapter 3, as people come to occupy the subject positions made available by discourse. I now examine the data which shows social work students constructing their professional and personal identities in relation to the regulatory discourse: rules, documents, and discursive meanings that have evolved in response to social work registration, and practices such as judgements about professional suitability.

In analysing students' talk, as discussed in chapter 6, discourses are conceptualised in terms of the interpretative repertoires that offer resources for constructing meaning. I identified two distinct and contrasting repertoires which enable students to talk about (and thus construct) their identities in relation to social work registration. The 'high impact' repertoire acknowledges - explicitly or implicitly - the GSCC's power to materially affect social work students' studies, or their future employment in the profession. The 'low impact' repertoire makes light of, or rejects, this power.

The notion that registration is a source of professional status underpins some participants' talk about their developing professional identities. Registration is depicted as having a positive effect for the profession as a whole, and by implication for the individual student aspiring to be a social worker. This is evident in the following extracts, in which the speakers talk about professional identity:

Extract 1

Lynne:

1. I mean I suppose it is nice that you do have that registration
2. ... I suppose it does back up your professional identity
3. Having that registration
- [...]
4. When I was registered
5. I did look myself up on the website<sup>11</sup> and thought
6. Ooh I'm there

Fran:

7. Was that a good feeling to be there?

Lynne:

8. Yes it was.

Extract 2

Joanne:

1. I think it will help people to feel
2. More professional
3. And when we feel more professional we act in a more professional way
4. I think it does build confidence really
5. Um
6. To be able to say well I belong to this professional body
7. Therefore I am expected to conduct myself in a certain way.

---

<sup>11</sup> The speaker is referring to the GSCC website, where anyone can view the names of people on the social care register.

## Chapter 9: Professional registration: the impact on students' education, and on their personal and professional identities

As these two students talk about professional identity, they position themselves as subjects in the regulatory discourse. The discourse, however, contains contradictory meanings: as previously discussed, Wetherell (2001b:25) refers to intersecting discourses as an argumentative texture, which she likens to the intersecting threads of woven cloth. In the next two extracts, students draw on the contrasting discursive threads in the GSCC's conceptualisation of registration: the discourses of 'professionalism', concerned with raising the status of social work; and 'control', undermining social workers' integrity and autonomy.

### Extract 3

Olanna:

1. If you're not registered
2. You're not on their books
3. You'll not get a job
4. You are not a professional
5. Because
6. Being a professional
7. Is because you have the governing body

Fran:

8. Mmm

Olanna:

9. And they're the governing body
10. That they can report to
11. If there is any misconduct.

Extract 4

Pete:

1. We're providing a service to vulnerable people at the end of the day
2. And if there is anything which questions people's
3. Ability to do that work
4. Um
5. Then
6. You know, I suppose that's [registration]
7. Definitely a good thing.

Here, both speakers adopt the control discourse to depict the GSCC's role. They employ phrases and ideas which are easily traced to the discourses used in policy and media representations about social work registration (for example, Batty, 2003; GSCC, 2002 and 2008). Extract 3, for instance, contains an implicit reference to the 'protected title' status conferred by social work registration (chapter 2). It is noticeable that in extract 4, the rhetorical work - 'if' in line 2, and 'I suppose' in line 6 - suggests dilemmatic thinking (Billig, 1988), which I will consider later in this chapter.

Extracts 3 and 4 arose in the context of discussing registration in general terms; participants were also invited to talk about instances when their conduct had led to an actual or potential investigation. Two participants shared such experiences from their practice learning; their transcripts provide particular insights into the subject positions that are conferred or taken up in response to the control discourse. In extract 5, the speaker tells a story about how his place on the social work course, and his future professional identity, could have been threatened by breaching the conditions of his GSCC registration. He

recounts that on Christmas Eve, a service user complained to the team manager about him. The complaint is presented as a worrying incident, not least because the speaker had to wait until after the Christmas holidays to find out whether he was going to be reported to the GSCC. The speaker explains that, after several exchanges of letters, the matter was resolved; he nevertheless recognises that the service user 'could have made a complaint straight to the GSCC':

#### Extract 5

Jak:

1. And at that point it could have jeopardised all kinds of things
2. I was on the [social work] course at the time so
3. ... I would have been suspended
4. ... Or
5. If it had been upheld
6. I could have been struck off
7. Literally
8. And
9. You know
10. I found myself in social work
11. And social work is my career
12. If I get struck off
13. I haven't got anything else.

In the next extract (which has been considerably reduced in length), a different speaker talks about what happened when a complaint actually was made to the GSCC about her. It



was alleged that, while she was a student, she had misrepresented herself as a qualified social worker; this became illegal soon after registration was introduced. The ensuing investigation, which took place over a period of sixteen weeks, concluded that there had been a misunderstanding: the student's explanation - that the initials 'S.W.' were used on her correspondence to mean 'support worker' - was accepted.

Extract 6

Joanne:

1. I was absolutely
2. You know, devastated.
- [...]
3. And I remember desperately trying to study for my exams
4. My [social work] exams
5. It was really difficult
6. And stressful
- [...]
7. It was just a very stressful stressful time really
8. Um and at one point I did think
9. I just don't need this really
10. But then it was a case of well if I
11. Chuck it in now then it looks as though
12. You know, I had done something wrong and
13. Then I thought well I'll clear my name
14. And that'll be it
15. But you know, over time I think

Chapter 9: Professional registration: the impact on students' education, and on their personal and professional identities

16. ... I kind of just learned from it

17. And kind of moved on from it.

Fran:

18. Mmm

Joanne:

19. But I think it will be

20. One of the experiences that I never really forget

21. It was horrible.

Extracts 5 and 6 describe different contexts: an investigation and a 'near miss'; there is, nevertheless, a pattern in the way the speakers position themselves. The dramatic use of rhetoric implicitly recognises the power of the regulatory discourse to construct subjects: in extract 5, the speaker's declarations - 'social work is my career' and 'I haven't got anything else' - evoke the sense of a jeopardised future. In the course of this extract, the speaker initially positions himself as a student poised on the brink of his chosen career: a respected subject in the regulatory discourse. As he speculates on what might have happened, he glimpses an alternative and less desirable subject position; still categorised by the discourse, he becomes an 'other': a person who is no longer suitable, who no longer has a career ahead of him. The speaker in extract 6 also conveys a disrupted trajectory (lines 1 and 2). She begins by positioning herself as an ordinary student preparing for her exams, confronted by extraordinary circumstances. Then, lines 8 – 21 show her occupying a rapid succession of further subject positions. There is a hint of resistance against the regulatory discourse in line 9: 'I just don't need this'. The speaker then draws on a criminal justice repertoire to evoke a sense of unfairness, presenting herself as a defendant who must prove her innocence. In lines 15 - 17, the speaker claims the position of survivor,

strong enough to put things behind her and 'move on'. This evaporates in lines 19 – 21, when she depicts herself as permanently marked by the experience. A little later, this theme is reprised:

Extract 7

Joanna:

1. Um I think it undermined my confidence for a while in my work and as a student
2. Um
3. And I kind of had that feeling well y'know
4. If I'm not
5. Um
6. Good enough really I suppose.
- [...]
7. I think it just made me feel
8. Are they going to be watching every single thing I do
9. And does this
10. Y'know do I now have a record of somebody who might be untrustworthy.

Here, the speaker finds her student and professional identities troubled and compromised by the new subject position assigned to her. We have seen (extract 6, lines 15 - 17) that she repairs this to some extent, but not without some detriment to her narrative identity work: she expresses concern at being continually under surveillance. It is worth pausing to consider why there should be so many changes of positioning, particularly in extract 6, in a relatively short section of interaction. It is, of course, usual for an individual's subject position to change within a conversation, as people orient to each other and the context

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Over and above this, these three extracts show people doing extensive identity work to reconcile the ideological dilemmas arising from competing discourses, and preserve a sense of personal and professional coherence.

Both speakers present these incidents as stressful and emotionally challenging, but it is important to reiterate that discourse analysis does not aim to uncover people's 'true feelings' or encourage speculation about mental states and emotions. Mental states - emotions, motivations and so on - are treated as discursive constructions, inter-subjectively constituted in the interaction itself (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The purpose of my analysis, therefore, is to expose the discursive resources that are used by the speakers to make sense of the situation: how they construct, and deal with threats to, their identities during the course of the interview.

The analysis in this section has highlighted the way in which the regulatory discourse is so powerful that it can constitute social work students as subjects, with both positive and negative consequences for their educational success and professional prospects. Discourse has been criticised because of its seemingly deterministic quality; Foucault's later work (1994b), however, emphasises a more agentic subject. Recent developments in discourse analysis start from the assumption that there is a 'paradoxical relationship between discourse and the speaking subject ... that people are, at the same time, both the products and producers of discourse' (Edley, 2001:190). In the next section I explore the identity work achieved through the interaction of interpretative repertoires and local resources.

*9.2.2 Personalising the discourse*

Local resources (discussed in chapter 6) may include previous versions of an identity, which constitute both a resource and a constraint for further identity work. In the extended extract which follows, the speaker combines interpretative repertoires with highly personalised local resources, to respond to the interviewer's question.

Extract 8

Fran:

1. What caused you anxiety about [the registration process]?

Jak:

2. I guess ... because of
3. My history, my past
4. And my brother and sister
5. You know
6. I've never been in care
7. But my brother and sister are
8. And I wondered if that made me
9. Um
10. Actually I wondered if it made me ineligible
11. ...To be a social worker

Fran:

12. What, because your brother and sister had been in care?

Jak:

13. Yeah
14. I know that sounds a bit weird

Chapter 9: Professional registration: the impact on students' education, and on their personal and professional identities

15. But it was that kind of

16. You know

17. ...Would I be perceived as a risk

18. ...By the GSCC

19. ...I mean I'm now quite open about the fact that I have a brother and sister in care

Fran:

20. Yes

Jak:

21. And very clear that I haven't been

22. ...Now I see it as ok that my brother and sister are in care

23. But it's interesting that I wouldn't want to be seen as being in care

[...]

24. I guess it's that whole thing round 'can you be objective'

25. If you're

26. That close to a subject like that

27. Um you know

28. And there's also that concept of

29. 'You're in care, you're a bad child'

Fran:

30. Mmm

Jak:

31. Which I absolutely hate

32. ... So for me there was that concept that if I was perceived to be in care

33. There'd be something wrong with me.

The speaker works very hard to reach a position that he finds acceptable. His speech is hesitant, and he appears to be feeling his way: 'I guess', 'actually I wondered if', 'I know that sounds a bit weird'. He seems caught between different interpretative repertoires. He challenges a supposed prejudice against children in the care system; at the same time, he reinforces such assumptions by distancing himself from being in care, thus positioning his siblings as 'other' (Derrida, 1981, discussed by Hall, 1996). As Billig (1988) argues, when people express prejudice, they are usually aware of the moral implications of their actions. They might simultaneously hold contradictory views, and have to make difficult choices about the way they present themselves. On three occasions, the speaker emphasises the difference between himself and his two siblings: 'I've never been in care, but my brother and sister are' (lines 6-7); he is 'open about' having siblings in care but 'very clear' that he hasn't been (lines 19-21); and, finally, he now sees it as 'ok' that his siblings are in care, while acknowledging that he himself 'wouldn't want to be seen as being in care' (lines 22 – 23). The speaker is aware of the contradiction, resolving it by drawing on a repertoire which is commonly expressed in social work education: that social workers need to recognise how their own life experiences may impact on their professional practice (Seden, 2011). Extract 8 shows how wider discourses interact with the speaker's own local resources to shape his identity work. The interview context is also influential: Billig et al. (1988:110) suggest that 'there may be situational factors encouraging the expression of a particular theme at a particular time'. In a different context - for example, a discussion about what motivates people to train as social workers - I suggest that the speaker might have presented his family situation as a positive local resource for constructing his student identity. Indeed, he does this earlier in the interview. In the context of a discussion about professional registration, however, the speaker's local resources constrain his identity, as he struggles to position himself in relation to the regulatory discourse. This discourse, as

discussed in chapter 2, is closely interwoven with discursive meanings about risk (McLaughlin, 2007), and the speaker questions his own professional suitability in this light: is he a risk (line 17), and can he be objective (line 24)? Even though the speaker draws on personalised resources, we should recall Billig et al.'s (1988:110) insistence that people's conversation is ideological, reflecting a society's wider beliefs and discourses. In extract 8, the speaker's talk is influenced both by critiques which hold that children in the care system face stigma, and recognition of the regulatory discourse, in which his own character and conduct are placed under scrutiny.

So far, then, the data shows the use of the 'high impact' repertoire to reinforce the discursive meaning of professional registration as having significant implications for students' professional education. I suggest, furthermore, that the use of the high impact repertoire broadly illustrates the operation of governmentality. This idea is now explored, as I consider the implications of registration for an aspect of social work students' personal identity: their conduct outside work.

### **9.3 Governmentality: 'it made me think more'**

Governmentality, introduced in chapter 3, involves people being educated to think and act in a way which brings their 'inner lives' into alignment with a dominant discourse (Usher et al., 1997). In this sense, people regulate their own conduct, ways of thinking and aspirations. For example, the National Occupational Standards which underpin academic and practice learning, discussed in chapter 2, emphasise social work students' accountability to the Codes of Practice. The next two extracts show the operation of governmentality, as speakers respond to my request for examples of how registration had affected their 'journey towards becoming a social worker':



Extract 9

Angie:

1. Well it made me think more about
2. My behaviour out of
3. Out of work
4. Whereas I don't think I'd even thought about it before
- [...]
5. So yeah I do think it's important actually.

Extract 10

Tom:

1. Well I've had to
2. Write about [being registered] in my essays
3. It comes up you know
4. In terms of
5. Ethics
6. That's obviously a hot topic in
7. You know
8. Reflecting on my work and in my essays
9. And so I do that
10. And I often refer to the GSCC's Codes of Practice in that
- [...]
11. But more than
12. But
13. I am aware of it and

- 14. I have
- 15. I have thought about it
- 16. And I've thought about
- 17. You know
- 18. It is
- 19. Er
- 20. It is
- 21. It is a position of responsibility again
- 22. To have that
- 23. To have that registration.

Both speakers acknowledge the implications of registration for their behaviour outside work, but extract 10 is particularly interesting because it illustrates the capillary qualities of power (chapter 2) which permeates people's thinking. The speaker initially frames his response in relation to meeting the academic requirements: he refers to the Codes in his written work. He then modifies his position, emphasising a more self-aware identification with the professional implications of registration. It could be argued that drawing on the high impact repertoire enables both speakers to construct themselves as 'willing subjects' ready to take up their expected positions in the regulatory discourse. In extract 10, the speaker's reference to essay writing and reflection illustrates how students use technologies of the self (Martin, 1988) to transform themselves into social workers. Technologies of the self are closely bound up with the concept of governmentality, because such transformations enable people to take up subject positions on which the discourse depends for its success.

Two especially striking instances of governmentality emerge in the data, as participants respond to my invitation to discuss examples of when they had felt 'worried about breaching the GSCC Codes of Practice'. Some say that they had not worried at all; but two speakers take particular care to align their personal identities with their professional suitability.

Extract 11

Tom:

1. Well
2. I am careful not to do anything that would jeopardise my registration
3. I am
4. I'm conscious that I've got this
5. Registration
6. But I don't know what I would be doing
7. To jeopardise it
8. Because I don't
9. You know
10. I'm not that kind of person that would go out
11. And er
12. Take drugs or anything like that
13. You know it's not
14. That's just not me
15. So
16. I can't imagine what I would be doing to
17. Jeopardise it

Chapter 9: Professional registration: the impact on students' education, and on their personal and professional identities

18. But
19. But yeah I am
20. Definitely aware of my
21. Er
22. Kind of position in
23. Society I guess.

Extract 12

Fran:

1. I just wondered if the process [of registering with the GSCC] had gone smoothly
2. Or whether you had any worries about the process
3. Like are they going to contact me, are they going to

Jak:

4. I was surprised they didn't
5. And the reason for that was
6. I've had four surnames in my past
7. For various reasons
- [...]
8. Yet it wasn't queried at all
9. And I don't know
10. I always felt like that was a bit weird
11. And that maybe they should.

Extract 11 shows the speaker constructing a particular version of personal identity, as he takes up a subject position as a responsible member of society. He positions himself as

'careful' and 'conscious of' protecting his registration, even though he doesn't knowingly engage in any behaviour which might 'jeopardise' it. In extract 12, in expressing surprise that he has not been called to account for his atypical family background, the speaker positions himself as a subject of regulation.

Finally, I want to explore some further instances of governmentality which, compared with the extracts above, depict ambivalence towards the regulatory discourse. The students are discussing the implications of registration for off-duty behaviour. Extract 13 intentionally provides a fuller version of the interaction shown in extract 4.

#### Extract 13

Pete:

1. I suppose these things are reviewed and looked into properly and perhaps
2. You know
3. As long as that's done and people are given a chance to have their say then
4. You know, that's fine

Fran:

5. Mmm

Pete:

6. We're providing a service to vulnerable people at the end of the day
7. And if there is anything which questions people's
8. Ability to do that work
9. Um
10. Then
11. You know, I suppose that's [registration]

12. Definitely a good thing.

Fran:

13. I mean that's been quite a change I think

[...]

Pete:

14. I suppose health and social care services are just being

15. Pulled into all sorts of scrutiny these days aren't they and

[...]

16. You know

17. In terms of being accountable to

18. The public.

#### Extract 14

Angie:

1. As long as

2. It doesn't get

3. Silly

[...]

4. I think it's fair enough really.

These two speakers adopt rhetorical strategies - 'I suppose'; 'perhaps'; 'as long as' - which convey ambivalence. They modify their acceptance of registration: it is reasonable so long as the system is operated properly and fairly, with a degree of moderation. Contrasting these conceptualisations of registration with the positive ones expressed in extracts 1 - 4, I suggest that participants are facing an ideological dilemma which springs from the

contradictory discursive meanings of registration. Drawing on Billig et al., 1987, Edley (2001:204) argues that different repertoires, and the ideological dilemmas they generate, 'do not necessarily arise spontaneously and independently, but develop together as opposing positions in an unfolding, historical, argumentative exchange'. In chapter 2, I argued that social work registration developed out of different debates: on one hand, the drive for professional status, and on the other, a response to the perceived failings of social services departments. When faced with the dilemma of aspiring to a profession whose trustworthiness and status are in question, participants are presented with a choice of taking up a subject position of either compliance or resistance. In order to reconcile the dilemma, students have to do rhetorical work to construct a reasonable subject position. For example, the speaker in extract 13 deals with the potential mistrust in his chosen profession by locating it within the wider discourse of risk and public accountability (McLaughlin, 2007).

McLaughlin's critique (2007:1269) of registration was that it had produced the '24/7 social worker', placing people under the scrutiny of their colleagues, service users and members of the public. The data shows some interesting patterns which illustrate both governmentality and the idea of being under surveillance:

#### Extract 15

Angie:

1. If
2. You were
3. I dunno
4. Drunk and disorderly or something and it was in the local paper

5. It doesn't look good does it really
6. I mean it's not good anyway but
7. You know if they do have headlines.

#### Extract 16

Pete:

1. I guess it doesn't look good if
2. I don't know
3. People are acting in a way which isn't appropriate I guess.

It is interesting that both speakers use the phrase 'it doesn't look good' to preface examples of when a social worker's out of work behaviour might be seen and judged negatively by members of the public or the media; similar ideas are evoked in extracts 24 and 25 below. Overall, extracts 13 – 16 suggest that the speakers arrive at a position which is both compliant *and* potentially resistant towards registration. As future professionals they are obliged to adhere to the regulatory discourse: but, as degree level students, it is reasonable to take a critical approach. Fleming (2005) argues that even irony and scepticism can be a form of resistance to discourse. In the next section I consider this idea further.

#### **9.4 Resistance: 'I don't think the GSCC comes into it day to day'**

So far, I have focused on data which draws mainly on the high impact interpretative repertoire, as a resource for discussing the implications of registration for participants' social work studies. I now examine talk which utilises the low impact repertoire to play down the significance of registration.



Extract 17

Fran:

1. While you were a student then
2. Did you have a sense of being registered with the GSCC
3. And did that have any impact
4. On your studies

Angie:

5. Um no
  6. I wouldn't say it did
- [laughter]
7. Didn't think about it at all
  8. Apart from when I had to pay my £10.

I suggest that this example, which makes light of registration, is a way of resisting the power of the regulatory discourse. Foucault argues (chapter 2) that, because discourses are continually in a process of change as they co-exist and interact with other discourses, there is always the possibility of resisting discursive power. People can subvert or reject a subject position which they are expected to occupy, or they may construct an alternative position. I develop this idea in considering the following examples, together with extract 17 above.

Extract 18

Pete:

1. It was just filling the form in and
2. Sending it off, getting the Codes of Practice

3. 'Right I'm registered now is that all I get for my 20 quid' kind of thing
4. D'you know what I mean.

Extract 19

Olanna:

1. GSCC doesn't do anything for you, they just
2. Hold your name
- [...]
3. You pay them money every year
4. They don't give you nothing
5. They don't send you Codes of Practice or something that has changed
6. Or
7. As a professional body
- [...]
8. Controlling your work
9. Or setting standards for your work
10. They don't send nothing out.

All three speakers use the low impact repertoire to talk about social work registration. Extract 19 expresses resistance the most overtly; the speaker utilises both the low and high repertoires within the same section of talk, minimising the GSCC's significance while simultaneously being critical that it does not offer more. As I discussed in chapter 3, however, resistance can be very subtle. The speakers in extracts 17 and 18 dismiss registration as a merely administrative and financial formality; here, resistance is not a case

of directly opposing the regulatory discourse, but is a refusal to acknowledge its importance. Another means of resistance is to invoke an alternative discourse:

Extract 20

Jak:

1. I don't think day to day the GSCC comes into it
2. It's just when formal things ... happen I guess.

Extract 21

Lynne:

1. Yeah, I think it's probably something that you don't
2. Think about greatly until you're told to think about it
3. Definitely
4. I mean you saw these code of conduct leaflets around the office.
5. I mean to me a lot of them are just sort of
6. Common sensical really
7. You know you wouldn't do that
8. If you're a decent human being
9. And a law abiding citizen
10. You don't do those sort of things.

Extract 22

Lynne:

1. The actual registration is quite secondary really, to qualifying [as a social worker].

In extract 21, the speaker subverts the regulatory meanings of the Codes of Practice by substituting an alternative connotation which emphasises 'decent' and 'human' values. In extract 22, she plays down the impact of registration by suggesting that her main concern is to successfully complete her social work degree. Note that the speaker in extract 20 had previously drawn on the high impact repertoire to talk about the potentially disastrous effect of being reported to the GSCC (extract 5). This use of contradictory repertoires, in the same interview, would seem to illustrate Billig et al.'s argument that talk can be dependent on context: the speaker's earlier assertion of the GSCC's importance may be a retrospective reflection on the incident.

I have noted that participants were invited to discuss instances of feeling concerned that their conduct might breach the conditions of their registration, set out in the Codes of Practice. It would have been possible to respond that there were no such examples (as other participants did). However, some speakers offer potential contraventions of the Codes, outside work. I would like to discuss four examples which show how the low impact repertoire provides a resource for participants to play down the role of registration in shaping workers' conduct; at the same time, this strategy is troubled by students' awareness that, as budding professionals, they should abide by the Codes. The first three are about 'getting drunk':

#### Extract 23

Lynne:

1. Yes, I have heard phone ins and things
2. About teachers who have been
3. Um

Chapter 9: Professional registration: the impact on students' education, and on their personal and professional identities

4. You know
5. They've gone out and they've got drunk
6. And you kind of think
7. Why? they're human.
8. I can remember going out and it was someone's leaving do
9. With a load of social workers
10. And they were
11. Really got hammered
12. But it's a stressful job and sometimes you need that release don't you.

Extract 24

Pete:

1. I like having a drink at the weekend
  2. Um
  3. And there's times where I probably
  4. I'm you know
  5. Sort of staggering around a little bit come sort of 11 o'clock
  6. You know, quite merry and jolly and everything
- [we both laugh]
7. I mean you know
  8. I wonder what would happen if the
  9. Head of the GSCC bumped into me when I was doing that and
  10. You know, having fun and stuff
  11. 'Well you know you've clearly drunk more than your 21 units er tonight'
  12. Which, you know, I have done.

Extract 25

Jak:

1. My image as a gay man
2. I could easily be
3. If I was
4. Photographed
5. Probably a little bit worse for wear
6. On a Friday night
7. Um
8. Out with friends
9. Looking like a bit of a prat
10. Um
11. Blowing off some steam
- [...]
12. And I certainly wouldn't want to be caught
13. With my pants down in town<sup>12</sup>
14. Because
15. You know
16. It never looks good.
- [laughter]

There is nothing specific in the Codes to proscribe 'getting drunk' outside of work hours, so it is interesting that many participants choose this example. It is possible that this is a local resource, in that alcohol use typically features in case study discussions about

---

<sup>12</sup> The meaning here is 'in an embarrassing situation'.

professional suitability, which students may be familiar with from their academic and practice learning. Whatever the reasons, the frequency with which it appears across the transcripts suggests that 'getting drunk' holds meaning for some participants, as a potentially contentious area of the Codes. The speakers adopt a number of rhetorical strategies to deal with this trouble. Firstly, euphemisms are used to normalise excessive alcohol use: 'hammered'; 'merry and jolly'; 'a little bit worse for wear'. Another strategy is for the speaker to emphasise the social aspects of drinking alcohol: being 'human', 'having fun', going 'out with friends'; it is also represented as a social practice which reinforces a sense of identification with gay culture or an occupational group. Third, drinking alcohol is represented as a means of dealing with work-related stress ('you need that release' and 'blowing off some steam').

I suggest that in White British culture, these are not unusual ways of talking about drinking alcohol (even less so, perhaps, among groups of university students). There are, moreover, different discourses of alcohol use (Social Issues Research Centre, undated), which participants exploit in their talk. In the interview context, however, I suggest that these rhetorical strategies - and the open nature of this discussion - can be understood as a form of resistance to the regulatory discourse. The resistance is not the use of alcohol in itself, but, rather, the subtle questioning of the parameters of suitable behaviour, and the undermining of this assumption by drawing on an alternative discourse. So, therefore, rhetorical phrases such as 'and you kind of think, why? they're human' and 'I wonder what would happen if the Head of the GSCC bumped into me' can be read as a challenge to the regulatory discourse. The acknowledgement, that drinking might compromise the conditions of their registration, presents participants' with an ideological dilemma that requires negotiation between contrasting interpretative repertoires. The dilemma may have

been sharpened by the interview context, in which participants may not have wanted to construct an 'unsuitable' identity. Humour, on the part of both myself and the participant (extracts 24, line 6, and extract 25 lines 12 – 16) acts as a device for defusing the tension around this ideological dilemma. It also draws me in as a co-constructor, so that I become complicit in this resistance. The fourth extract, and the final one in this chapter, provides a further example of subverting the regulatory discourse, drawing instead on an alternative repertoire.

Earlier in the interview, the next speaker had constructed an identity of a person who is 'decent', 'human', and 'law abiding' (extract 21). It is no surprise, therefore, when she says that she had no significant worries about registration. This position is troubled, however, as she adds that she had 'wondered' whether, as a registered social work student, she should refrain from smoking cannabis with her partner (from whom she subsequently became divorced).

#### Extract 26

Fran:

1. I wondered if you had an example that you could give me
2. From your personal or your working life
3. Or on your placement
4. Um
5. That made you feel worried about breaching the
6. GSCC Codes of Practice



Lynne:

7. Well yes
8. My now ex-partner
9. Who was a social worker
10. Enjoyed cannabis
11. Regularly
12. And you kind of think
13. Well should I really be partaking of it
14. ... He also had friends who also liked to smoke
15. They were still social workers
16. And it's a change in attitude really isn't it because
17. They'd been smoking since they were
18. Well
19. Ex-hippies
- [...]
20. And I thought maybe I shouldn't be smoking it
- [laughter]
21. But then again you know
22. In the comfort of your own home
- [...]
23. You're not actually harming anybody
24. But it is an illegal activity
25. ... So yeah
26. I suppose that's one thing I did wonder

Chapter 9: Professional registration: the impact on students' education, and on their personal and professional identities

Fran:

- 27. Yes
- 28. Did it cause you any
- 29. Particular worries about that
- 30. You know?

Lynne:

- 31. No
- 32. No not really
- 33. Just a wonder
- 34. Should I be doing this?
- 35. But I mean
- 36. I didn't do it to any great extent.

This extract illustrates Taylor and Littleton's proposition (2006) that previous identities, used as a local resource, can act as a constraint. Trouble arises when the cultural associations of the speaker's prior positioning are difficult to reconcile with her new one. To some extent this is presented as an ideological dilemma: shortly beforehand, the speaker had drawn on interpretative repertoires about being a 'decent citizen' who didn't break the law. She now constructs another identity as someone who has, in the past, routinely used cannabis as part of her social life. In taking up this second position she draws on an implicit repertoire about what is acceptable within an alternative ('hippy') culture. She must now resolve the conundrum: can a law-abiding person, especially one who aspires to be a GSCC-registered social worker, use an illegal drug? The speaker adopts a number of rhetorical strategies to deal with this difficulty. First, she depicts the use of cannabis as a social activity which takes place in a particular context - a 'hippy'

culture - which is a way of justifying and normalising it. Second, she locates this activity in a temporal sense: it was something she did in the past with her ex-partner. Furthermore, she reveals that her ex-partner and his friends were social workers. This strategy, coupled with the suggestion that attitudes have changed (line 16), has the effect of undermining the regulatory discourse.

### **9.5 Discussion**

In this chapter I have examined participants' talk about the implications of professional registration for their social work studies, their professional identities and selected aspects of their life outside work. The analytic tools developed in the previous two chapters have been applied. In addition, a particular methodological feature of this chapter has been to consider the data from the perspective of a Foucauldian poststructuralist approach: the operation of discourse and power, and the concepts of governmentality and resistance. Given the particular focus of this chapter, these concepts provided an appropriate framework for interpreting the data.

Two distinct interpretative repertoires were identified. The high impact repertoire acknowledged the GSCC's influence on social work students' studies and future employment, and for the profession as a whole. The low impact repertoire played down or rejected this perspective. In most transcripts, students drew on both repertoires at different points of the discussion, as they took up subject positions in relation to the regulatory discourse. All the transcripts accorded importance to the role of registration and the Codes of Practice; there were accounts of how participants incorporated and embedded these values and beliefs into their everyday student and professional identities. That said, there was variation in the enthusiasm with which 'regulated' subject positions were taken on.

Overall, though, the analysis in this chapter provides support for Wetherell and Edley's (1999:337) assertion that discursive practices play a central role in constituting subjectivity:

That is, what it means to be a person, the formulation of an internal life, an identity and a way of being in the world develop as external public dialogue moves inside to form the 'voices of the mind'.

Next, I considered the data from the perspective of governmentality, and argued that the use of the high impact repertoire provided the opportunity to see what this concept looks like in practice. Here, we saw students modifying their talk to construct themselves as willing subjects ready to take up their expected positions in the regulatory discourse. There was a sense, too, that 'misconduct' out of work might be exacerbated if witnessed by others. The data also illustrates the role of technologies of the self in achieving governmentality, as students talked about their reflective writing and self-evaluation for assessment purposes. It can be argued that, to some extent, the interviews themselves were used by the students as technologies to construct and practise their professional identities.

Finally, I explored the concept of resistance to the regulatory discourse. Expressions of resistance were subtle: playing down the importance of registration; subverting the discourse with rhetorical strategies that invoked alternative meanings about alcohol use; undermining it by drawing attention to shifting cultural norms. The presence of resistance, perhaps especially in this subtle form, supports the argument that discourses need not necessarily have a deterministic effect, because there is always space for alternative positions to develop.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that registration has brought students' private and professional lives closer together, and one of the research questions is to explore whether students perceive any personal consequences of their transition from 'lay person' to 'qualified social worker'. It is interesting to note, therefore, that in extracts 21 - 24, there is a sense of participants marking a boundary between their work and off-duty time, and between personal and professional identity: they talk of needing release from a stressful job, and even having the opportunity to behave inappropriately at times.

From a theoretical perspective, this chapter provides a practical illustration of how discourse operates; its multi-dimensional nature is reflected in the presence of different repertoires in participants' talk. In this chapter we have seen participants doing extensive identity work to reconcile the ideological dilemmas which arise from the competing discourses inherent in registration, in order to preserve a sense of personal and professional coherence.

From a methodological perspective, a particular strength of the discourse analysis method is that it opens up rich possibilities for making sense of data, especially when it is initially puzzling. For example, at first I had difficulty in analysing the alternating shifts between the high impact and low impact repertoires in students' talk about registration (for example, the speaker in extracts 13 and 16). When I thought about the function of the rhetorical strategies, I was able to see that the speaker's acceptance of registration was partial and conditional. Similarly, the analysis of rhetorical strategies helped me to make sense of the euphemistic way that alcohol use was talked about. Locating the analysis

within a Foucauldian framework has further illuminated the data, and provides practical examples of how post-structuralist ideas can be applied.

Once again, it is important to locate participants' talk within the wider context of discourses used in policy and media representations about social work registration. This is not only because such contextualisation is a feature of the analytic method, but also because it provides insight into the discursive resources that were available to participants through teaching materials and workplace discussions.

## **9.6 Conclusion**

The analysis in this chapter has provided further answers to the research questions, showing the delicate path that students must steer, between allegiance to their professional codes and their wish to preserve a sense of separateness in their off-duty time. Their talk highlights the potential juggling of interpretative repertoires and subject positions - student and registrant - which have to be achieved in developing a professional identity. In chapters 7 and 8, the data has shown students having to re-negotiate their identities to reconcile the demands of social work education and their personal, family and cultural backgrounds. This was consistent with other research on mature and non-traditional students entering higher education (chapter 3). Now we see that professional registration acts as an additional layer of discursive meaning, which acts both as a resource and a challenge for social work students.

This chapter concludes the data analysis. The final part of the thesis begins by reviewing the findings from this and the two previous chapters, evaluates the study, and draws out the implications for professional practice.

## **Part 4**

### **Summary, evaluation and implications for professional practice in social work education**

## **Chapter 10**

### **Summary, evaluation and implications for professional practice in social work education**

#### **10.1 Introduction**

In reviewing what my research has achieved, I will begin with an overview of findings from the analysis, and consider the extent to which they provide answers to the research questions. I then go on to reflect on the research process and the methodology. Finally, I will consider ways in which the research enhances my own professional practice and social work education.

#### **10.2 Overview of the analysis and findings**

The research topic arose, as I explained in chapter 1, from my awareness of clause 5.8 of the GSCC Codes of Practice (2002); which instructs social workers and students that they must not behave, 'in work or outside work', in a way that would compromise their professional suitability. Working in the field of social work education, I became curious about the implications of registration for students' private lives. This curiosity, sharpened by the media response to the GSCC's first conduct case, was informed by my interest in post-structuralist theories about discourse and identities. I wondered whether social work registration might be viewed as part of a discursive regime: what kind of subject positions might it create, and what effects would there be for social work students? It took time to establish that these were questions worth asking, because, as noted in chapter 1, the implications of clause 5.8 did not initially arouse a significant level of interest among colleagues and practitioners.



The literature reviewed in chapter 2 established that academic debate about social work registration, especially from an educational perspective, has been building slowly. In the early days of registration, the main focus of academic research was, understandably, on the implications of the new Social Work Degree, launched in 2003. When registration for students was introduced in 2005, concerns focused mainly on the considerable administrative changes involved for universities. Gradually, however, attention has turned to the pedagogical and ethical implications for university staff, who must balance decisions about professional suitability with the desire - and the requirement - to widen participation. These are vital and ongoing discussions (with which, in my daily professional role, I am involved). To date, however, few studies have considered registration from the student perspective. Moreover, current studies of this kind focus primarily on the implications for student selection or practice learning. My own interest – and, I believe, the contribution this research can make – is in considering the personal implications for students, not just the professional ones. I therefore designed the interviews, as discussed in chapter 5, to contextualise students' talk about registration within the broader framework of their social work studies.

In chapter 2, I utilised the literature on discourse to develop a picture of professional registration as a discursive practice (which, I have argued, is part of a broader regulatory discourse that includes social work education). The post-structuralist view, discussed in chapter 3, holds that, as we go about our everyday business and take part in social interaction, we draw on a wide range of discursive meanings to continually construct multiple identities. I wanted to find out, therefore, how the introduction of registration has affected the discursive resources which contribute to the construction of social work

students' personal and professional identities. I will now discuss what the research findings offer, in response to the four research questions I introduced at the end of the first chapter.

#### *10.2.1 Talking about social work education*

I began, in chapter 7, by exploring the data in which students talked about their social work studies. The considerable workload demands for sponsored social work students is familiar to all involved with the University programme, so I was not surprised when this theme emerged as an interpretative repertoire across all seven transcripts. I had no preconceptions about the others; possibly because my role does not involve frequent and routine contact with individual students. It was pleasing to discover one particular repertoire in the data: the Social Work Programme was referred to as 'an opportunity'. The University does, of course, present itself in terms of opportunity; this interpretative repertoire would have been reinforced in the employers' publicity documentation about sponsorship.

The analysis revealed two unanticipated insights: one was the frequency with which students referred to the personal growth they enjoyed through undertaking the social work course. Another unexpected finding was that social work education was experienced as challenging: not just because of the amount of work involved, but also because of its personal implications. Participants' identities as students, expressed in positive terms most of the time, were troubled because they did not conform to their own or others' perceived idea of a 'typical' student. Becoming a social worker also affected participants' relationships with their families and friends, as discussed below.

In chapter 9 we saw that, on the whole, students were familiar with discursive meanings about the purpose of registration and its implications for their professional practice. These

meanings are transmitted, I suggest, in the curriculum requirements and the course materials. They are also found in the workplace: for example, most social work offices subscribe to the weekly professional journal, *Community Care*, which regularly includes reports and debates on the outcomes of GSCC conduct cases. The data shows students drawing on this discursive knowledge as a resource to discuss their social work studies and their future as professionally qualified practitioners. So, they frequently talked about integrating the Codes of Practice into their university course work and their practice learning assessment; and many of them referred to the notion of 'protected title' when talking about their future as qualified workers.

#### *10.2.2 Talking about private and professional life*

It would have been intrusive to explore participants' personal lives in detail, given the stated purpose of the research. Nevertheless, they volunteered biographical data at many points across the interview. I have had to be selective in presenting the final version of this thesis, and some of this data has been omitted. It is also likely that, aware of the purpose of my research, students themselves talked selectively about areas of personal life that seemed relevant to the topic. Jak talked about his siblings being in care; Pete referred to his previous mental health breakdown. In addition, the informal nature of the interviews led to discussions and asides about family relationships; use of leisure time; religious and political beliefs; education histories, and many more glimpses into participants' lives outside social work. So, Lynne talked about her divorce; Olanna revealed a childhood of poverty and hard work, growing up away from her biological mother; Joanne referred to her own serious illness, a few years previously. It would have been unethical to pursue these narrative fragments beyond the bounds of the research questions, but their presence

in the transcripts reinforces the premise that identities are multi-dimensional and contingent on people's changing circumstances.

In chapter 4, I suggested that professional identity is more complicated than adopting certain traits or values, or even demonstrating competence. I agree with Watson (2006), who argues that professional identity is also contingent on personal experience. The data shows students drawing on a wide range of discursive resources, including local ones of their own workplaces, personal histories and values. Different research questions might have developed this further, of course. I might have asked students to talk about instances when their social work practice had been influenced by personal experience, for example; but this more general question would not have been in keeping with the stated purpose of my study.

Wenger's theory, of situated learning in communities of practice, has also proved fruitful in understanding professional identity. This suggests that, when students are learning to be social workers, they follow certain 'trajectories', which take them from an unqualified position to professional status. I find it particularly helpful to think of students as legitimate peripheral participants (Wenger, 1998:165), moving back and forth across the boundary lines of 'unqualified' and 'professional'. The analysis in chapter 8 suggests that the student trajectory also involves a negotiation between personal and professional identity, which participants found difficult: not because they lacked understanding, but because there are different interpretative repertoires about how qualified social workers should approach the relationship between personal and professional life. Some participants struggled to reconcile conflicting perspectives, reflected in professional guidance, about the place of self-disclosure in professional practice.

*10.2.3 The personal consequences of the transition from 'lay person' to 'social worker'*

The data discussed in chapter 9 suggests that all the students were aware of the potential implications of registration for a social worker's private life. In most cases, they discussed these implications in relation to their own circumstances. They told relatively light-hearted anecdotes about weekend social drinking and past use of cannabis; there were also more solemn narratives about mental health breakdowns and difficult family circumstances.

There were, in addition, consequences of the transition from 'lay person' to 'social worker' which took me by surprise. In chapter 7, I discussed the frequently recurring pattern in students' talk about their changing relationships with friends and family. In these sections of data, we saw personal experience utilised as a local resource, to convey a sense that students found themselves misunderstood - and in some cases mistrusted - by family and friends. This discovery led me to extend my literature review, and I found that my findings were consistent with studies of the impact of higher and professional education on the identities of non-traditional students. In my own interviews, I did not pursue the potentially destabilising effects of these changes, but it seems possible that these might, perhaps, have implications for students' usual support networks.

*10.2.4 Talking about registration*

As might be expected, participants' talk about professional registration varied according to their own experiences. In chapter 9, two students gave vivid accounts of their professional conduct being investigated (in one case by the employer and in the other case by the regulatory body). These students talked emotively about the potentially disrupted trajectories of their chosen careers; however, when invited to give examples of breaching the Codes of Practice outside working hours, all participants gave examples which showed

they were aware of the implications of registration for personal life. I was interested, and initially surprised, when the analysis uncovered varying degrees of ambivalence about professional registration. On the one hand, students expressed compliance with the regulatory discourse; on the other, the analysis revealed subtle instances of resistance: dismissing registration as merely administrative, for example. It is not possible, on the basis of seven transcripts, to make any generalisations about this mixture of compliance and resistance. However, such a finding is consistent with Billig et al.'s (1988) argument that everyday thinking is dilemmatic: the presence of contradictory repertoires in students' talk is likely to reflect wider discursive meanings about the functions of social work registration, both to control the workforce and to raise professional status. Powell and Gilbert (2007:195) propose, moreover, that because people occupy multiple subject positions, 'it becomes possible that the docile, industrious and resistant subject can occur within a single individual'. My personal observation is that, in the *Community Care* (2006) online forum, practitioners and students do take up varied positions in relation to registration. From a theoretical perspective, I suggest that this mix of compliance and resistance provides a practical illustration of certain common aspects of all discourse. Here, we can see its power to constrain what may and may not be said, the co-existence of competing argumentative threads, and the range of ways in which people take up or reject subject positions.

Reviewing the whole, I consider that the broad aim of the research has been achieved. Relevant data has been obtained, and the analysis enables me to argue that, for social work students, being registered with the regulatory body has a significant impact on the way that they construct their personal and professional identities. However, while registration does seem to have an impact on how students behave and how they see themselves, this has to

be placed in the broader context of the challenging identity work involved in moving from 'unqualified' to 'professional'.

### **10.3 Evaluation**

Debate exists about the most appropriate criteria with which to evaluate qualitative research, and especially discourse analysis. Citing Seale (1999), Taylor (2001b:319) argues that the traditional criteria for evaluating research derive from a positivist epistemology:

‘conceptions of reliability and replicability ... are rooted in a realist view of a single external reality .... and ...[v]alidity ... refers to nothing less than truth ... [and] a stable social reality’.

For research in the qualitative tradition, therefore, the situated and contingent nature of truth and reality render the trio of ‘reliability, validity and replicability’ less useful measures for evaluation. Wetherell (1998:405) argues that ‘conventional criteria for evaluating scholarship ... coherence, plausibility, validity and insight’ can nevertheless be achieved in ways that are more appropriate for discourse analysis: for example, ‘when analysts include ... investigation of the social and political consequences of discursive patterning’. Furthermore, Taylor (2001b:320) offers the following guidance: discourse research should be ‘located in relation to previously published work, whether of theory or analysis, building on or challenging the claims of other academics’; it should be ‘coherent, depending for its persuasiveness on argument rather than ... emotional impact’; and the analysis must involve rigour, that is, ‘systematic investigation’. To these ends (Taylor, 2001b:323), the researcher should provide ‘detailed accounts of the processes of data collection and analysis as well as the more theoretical underpinning’. How does my own research measure up to this guidance?

I located my research within the post-structuralist tradition, drawing on the theoretical literature about discourse and identity. Having decided to use a post-structuralist framework, there were, nevertheless, other lines of thinking that I could have pursued. Developments which combine Foucauldian and Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches seem especially relevant to the study of professional identity; indeed, Brown et al. (2006) utilise Judith Butler's work to examine the regulatory effects of education. Hollway's psychosocial methodology might have facilitated an exploration of how students' personal histories influence their professional choices. Alternatively, I could have placed a greater emphasis on the narrative method, to examine individuals' stories of professional development. Any of these approaches would have been relevant; but my decision, after consideration, was to confine myself to an analysis informed by Foucault's writings, thus maintaining theoretical and methodological coherence within a relatively compact thesis.

Theoretical coherence has been achieved, as discussed in chapter 1, by using post-structuralist concepts as a framework for the research questions, which were formulated to examine the effect of discourse on social work students' identities. Drawing on theories about identity and narrative identity, I designed the interview schedule to generate interaction; this flowed from the assumption that discourses manifest themselves in the interpretative repertoires that shape people's talk. To explore the potential of a discursive approach for research, I consulted a range of published studies and reviewed different ways of analysing and presenting data. In particular, I have drawn explicitly on the work of well-known and respected discourse researchers, to develop the methodology described in chapter 6. Taking an eclectic approach, I nevertheless examined the theoretical roots of the different analytic concepts, to ensure their compatibility and coherence. The methods are, I believe, broadly consistent with Foucault's theories; with the additional advantage of



showing what these constructs ‘look like’ in practice: what it means to draw on an interpretative repertoire; how a subject position manifests itself in everyday talk; how resistance is expressed through rhetorical strategies.

Taylor (2001:320) advises that discourse research should persuade through argument, rather than emotional impact; in this respect, the temptation to ‘let the data speak for itself’ should be avoided. This is especially important because discourse research often deals with sensitive topics. Elaborating on this theme, Antaki et al. (2003:9-10) warn that systematic analysis - by which they mean the examination of rhetorical and discursive manoeuvres - must not be replaced by ‘position-taking’, such as ‘giving voice or empowering the powerless through extensive quotation’; ‘criticising the speaker for a lack of understanding’; or other kinds of ‘[s]ympathy and scolding’. My data contained some very emotive content, and it was initially difficult not to attribute feelings or attitudes to the speakers. However, a particular feature of this method is that its focus is on the function of talk and other discursive resources, rather than on individual biographies. Describing talk in terms of people’s supposed emotions and mental states is firmly discouraged. By applying the method in a rigorous way, I was able to stand back from the emotional impact and base my analysis on a careful working-through of the theoretical constructs. There is a risk that this approach might appear distanced and unsympathetic, but on the whole, I suggest it is more ethically defensible than making assumptions about what people may be thinking and feeling. It also takes account of the theoretical premise that discourse data is co-constructed in the interview context, not a ‘once and for all’ version of ‘truth’.

Rigour, in the sense of systematic investigation, is achieved in discourse analysis through the depth of the reporting: ‘the richness of detail present both in the data and in the analysis

presented to the reader, and ... the explication of the process of analysis' (Taylor, 2000b:321). I have included extended stretches of transcribed data, where practical, in order to render my methods transparent and open to scrutiny. In addition, Wetherell (1998:405) proposes that scholarship involves including some investigation of 'the social and political consequences' of discursive patterns. I believe that, in continually linking the analysis to the wider social and educational context, I have achieved this within the scope of the research aim.

Although the success of this method does not rely on its replicability, Taylor (2001b) suggests that traditional quantitative techniques, such as using two or more methods, are sometimes used. I did not set out to replicate the findings, but when a colleague from another university asked if she could adapt my focus group methodology for use in social work teaching, I was interested to see that other students raised similar points (Appendix 1). I also compared my interview findings with those of similar educational research; and took steps to 'ground' my decisions about interpretative repertoires by relating them to broader discursive themes which constitute society's argumentative texture (Wetherell, 2001b:25).

Taylor (2001b) suggests that a measure of validation might be achieved through getting feedback from participants, but, she adds, this can be difficult because of the situated nature of the findings. Certainly, as the analysis developed, I became aware that the findings are a particular version of truth, jointly constructed by myself and the participants in each interview. Moreover, the interpretation is based on my own immersion in a body of transcripts (Taylor and Littleton, 2006) rather than participants' individual or collective stories. For this reason, I decided not to check my interpretations and findings with

participants (beyond sending each person their own transcript for comment), agreeing with Taylor (2001b:322) that:

[if] the interpretation is not being presented as truth but as an analysis underpinned by theory, there is no reason why non-academic participants should be especially qualified to validate it. Even at the level of a transcript, the participant is being asked to comment on a construction rather than a transparent record’.

A further measure of the quality of research is its usefulness (Taylor, 2001b). In the final section of this chapter, I consider the contribution that this research makes to social work education. First, however, I want to highlight certain limitations and features of this study, which need to be taken into account.

Recruitment difficulties resulted in a smaller sample than I had hoped for; this probably reduced the variety of interpretative repertoires which could be identified. Analysis can be enriched by identifying the use of alternative repertoires in some transcripts. Although I noted single ‘deviant’ cases, it was not really possible to identify patterns across transcripts in these instances. For example, when talking about social work education, Angie did not use the same repertoires as other participants, but I would need to see this pattern repeated in other speakers’ talk before drawing out any interpretation with confidence. A larger number of transcripts might have made this easier.

It should also be emphasised that the findings apply to a particular group of students who are sponsored by their employers; who are older and more experienced than average, and with one exception, in their final year of study. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 5, I was unable to recruit many participants who had actually experienced difficulties with

registration. This makes it difficult to generate suggestions about the extent to which certain groups of students might find themselves excluded, or subject to particular scrutiny, by the regulatory discourse. In any case, the small size and particular nature of the sample would make it impossible to generalise. On the other hand, as the method is not intended to produce a 'true picture', the limitations of the sample are not necessarily problematic. The strength of discourse analysis is its capacity to draw attention to contradictions and difficult issues in social practices, which might otherwise be taken for granted: in this case, the ones raised by professional registration for social work students, evidenced in participants' talk. I now want to look at the implications of these findings for professional practice within social work education.

#### **10.4 Implications for professional practice in social work education**

A year after starting this research, I moved from my lecturer role on the Social Work Programme to a management role, in which I am responsible for the operation of the University's 'suitability' procedures. I am the first incumbent of this role, and the job and research have developed side by side. On the one hand, the research has informed my practice, providing me with a critical perspective and a wider picture of regulatory requirements. My dealings with students, colleagues and the regulatory body have benefited from having a sense of the competing discourses underpinning registration policies. On the other hand, I have been able to ground the research in the practicalities of social work education; for example, my understanding of the curriculum requirements has provided insight into the particular kind of professional identity that they aim to produce.

There are a number of ways that this research can benefit the Social Work Programme. Registration, we have seen, exerts a powerful discursive effect, and being investigated for

potential breaches of the Codes of Practice has disruptive effects on participants' studies, with implications for their personal and professional identities. The Social Work Programme regularly investigates the circumstances of students who declare a criminal or disciplinary offence. In most cases, these are relatively minor and quickly resolved, but I am aware from my professional dealings with this group of students that even minor investigations appear to cause anxiety and distress. As part of my professional role, therefore, I am committed to reviewing our suitability processes in the coming year, with a view to ensuring these are sensitive to the student position.

My research findings, and the enhanced knowledge that I have gained, can contribute to improving students' understanding of registration and its implications for professional identity. This might be achieved, for example, by reviewing and re-writing the guidance provided for students at the start of the programme. Although the research participants had an understanding of how registration impacted on their professional and personal identities, it is possible that they were more knowledgeable than students who did not volunteer; in addition, my earlier study suggests that first year students may not be so well informed.

The research findings suggest that the transition from unqualified worker to professional can have a destabilising effect on personal identity. This may be all the more challenging when students' usual support networks are disrupted by changes in their personal relationships. The Programme curriculum already provides reflective space for students to consider the impact of personal identity on professional life; but I have offered to disseminate the research findings at staff meetings, to promote discussion about the implications of registration with colleagues who work directly with students. Given the importance of the curriculum for developing professional identity, I could also look for

opportunities to contribute to course design; for example, it might be possible to record podcast interviews with employers and students who are willing to talk about the implications of registration. I have already contributed a chapter on this topic to a new book for post-graduate social work students (Wiles, 2011), which I hope will be read by colleagues and students, from other universities as well as my own.

Beyond my own team, this work is of interest for my own university and the wider academic community. A recent presentation to Faculty colleagues, involved with other professional programmes, generated suggestions for further joint research. Since the start of my research, I have regularly taken up opportunities to present work-in-progress at conferences (social work, youth work, and social policy). These presentations have stimulated my own research and prompted more generally useful discussions: for example, about the appropriateness of encouraging students to take an academically critical approach to the policy of social work registration. These wider discussions have led to the acceptance of a journal article about the ethical implications of researching social work registration (Wiles, 2010). In these ways, my research is leading me to contribute to current academic debate.

Finally, there are a number of ways in which this research suggests further study. Widening the recruitment strategy to include other universities might augment and enrich the data, and reduce the potential for conflict of interest. Alternatively, it would be useful to explore the same research questions with greater numbers of social work students who have been through a suitability investigation, if the ethical issues could be resolved. This would enable further exploration of the implications of registration for the issue of widening participation, which the present study is not able to address to any great extent.

Taking another direction, it might be possible to explore, in more detail, the identity work that takes place as part of the professional curriculum, with a view to gaining more information about the factors that promote the development of professional identity.

### **10.5 A concluding postscript**

I believe that this research is especially significant because the participants were among the first cohort of social work students in England to be registered with the GSCC. Their talk suggests that since the introduction of professional registration, this small group of students have come to see it as an integral part of social work education and of the transition to being a qualified social worker. Looking across the study as a whole, it is not only about the implications of social work registration but can also be seen as a study of discourse in action. In particular, it is a reminder about the historically specific nature of discourses.

The GSCC started its work on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2001. Professional registration, introduced in 2005 and still quite new at the start of my research, has continued to evolve and to evoke controversy and debate. In November 2009, the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence published a negative appraisal of the GSCC's conduct work, citing a history of management failings (Lombard, 2009). In July 2010 the new government announced the abolition of the GSCC, as part of a review of 'arms-length bodies' within the Department of Health, and the transfer of its regulatory functions to the Health Professions Council in 2012 (Dunning, 2010). It is too early to know what effects this will have for social work students and universities - or, indeed, for the regulatory discourse - but it is interesting to observe that, less than ten years after the GSCC was heralded as one of the cornerstones of New Labour's modernising strategy, its demise has been announced. Nevertheless,

discourses retain their power by evolving and changing; I have shown that the meanings associated with social work registration have always been fluid and contested. Despite this apparent change in regime, the regulatory discourse will continue to influence the way that students negotiate their personal and professional identities.



## References

- Adams, K., Hean, S., Sturgis, P. and Macleod-Clark, J. (2005) 'Investigating the factors influencing professional identity of first year health and social care students', *Learning in Health and Social Care*, <http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/19083/> (Accessed 2007).
- Ahmed, M. (2006) 'More than 300 social workers admit medium to high risk offences to GSCC', *Community Care*, 30 May [Online], <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2006/05/30/54201/more-than-300-social-workers-admit-medium-to-high-risk-offences-to.html> (Accessed 09.04.09).
- Antaki, C., Billig, M., Edwards, D., Potter, J. (2003) 'Discourse Analysis Means Doing Analysis: A Critique Of Six Analytic Shortcomings', *Discourse Analysis Online*, Vol.1, No.1, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/daol/previous/v1/n1/index.htm> (Accessed 02.12.09).
- Ball, S.J. (1991) 'Power, conflict, micropolitics and all that!' in G. Walford, (ed) *Doing Educational Research*, London, Routledge.
- Banks, S. (2004) *Ethics, Accountability and the Social Professions*, Basingstoke, Palgrave.
- Barnes, D., Carpenter, J. and Dickinson, C. (2000) 'Interprofessional education for community mental health: attitudes to community care and professional stereotypes', *Social Work Education*, Vol.19, No.6, pp.565-583.
- Barton, D. and Tusting, K. (2005) *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, Power and Social Context*, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Batty, D. (2003) 'Registration scheme launched for social workers', *Society Guardian*, 1<sup>st</sup> April, [Online], <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2003/apr/01/uknews> (Accessed 02.07.09).
- Batty, D. (2004) 'April next year will mark the birth of a fully registered and qualified social work profession', *Society Guardian*, 16 February, [Online], <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2004/feb/16/1> (Accessed 02.07.09).
- Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D. and Radley, A. (1988) *Ideological Dilemmas*, London, Sage.
- Bisman, C. (2004) 'Social Work Values: the Moral Care of the Profession', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.34, No.1, pp.109-24.
- Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M. and Robson, K. (2001) *Focus groups in social research*, London, Sage.
- Bocock, J. and Taylor, R. (2003) 'The Labour Party and Higher Education: The Nature of the Relationship', *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol.57, No.3, pp.220-238.
- British Association of Social Workers (2002) *The Code of Ethics for Social Work*, <http://www.basw.co.uk/Portals/0/CODE%20OF%20ETHICS.pdf> (Accessed 12.06.09).
- Brown, T., Atkinson, D., and England, J. (2006) *Regulatory Discourses in Education*, Bern, Peter Lang.

- Burkitt, I. (1991) *Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality*, London, Sage.
- Burt, M. and Worsley, A. (2008) 'Social work, professionalism and the regulatory framework', in A.W. Fraser and S. Matthews, (eds) *The Critical Practitioner in Social Work and Health Care*, London, Sage.
- Carabine, J. (2001) 'Unmarried motherhood 1830 – 1990: A Genealogical Analysis' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates, (eds) *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, London, Sage.
- Care Standards Tribunal (2006) *YD v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (accessed 03.12.08).
- Care Standards Tribunal (2007) *Ben Neil De Almeida v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (accessed 03.12.08).
- Care Standards Tribunal (2008a) *DSH v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (accessed 03.12.08).
- Care Standards Tribunal (2008b) *VL v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (accessed 28.03.09).
- Carr, D. (2009) 'Revisiting the liberal and vocational dimensions of university education', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol.57, No.1, pp.1-17.
- Chappell, C., Rhodes, C., Solomon, N., Tennant, M. and Yates, L. (2003) *Reconstructing the Lifelong Learner: pedagogy and identity in individual, organisational and social change*, London, RoutledgeFalmer.
- Christensen, P., Hockey, J. and James, A. (1997) '“You have neither neighbours nor privacy”: ambiguities in the experience of emotional well-being of women in farming families', *The Sociological Review*, Vol.45, No.4, pp.621-644.
- Clark, C. (2006) 'Moral character in social work' in *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 36, No.1, pp.75-89.
- Clarke, J. (2000a) 'Part 1: The social policy orthodoxy and the beginnings of critique', in J. Clarke, G. Lewis and S. Gewirtz, (eds) *D860 Rethinking Social Policy: Study Guide*, Milton Keynes, The Open University.
- Clarke, J. (2000b) 'Reading New Labour: the construction of “A modern British People”', Research Note, *D860 Offprints Booklet*, Milton Keynes, The Open University.
- Clarke, J., Gewirtz, S., and McLaughlin, E. (2000) *New Managerialism, New Welfare*, London, Sage.
- Community Care (2006) online discussion forum 11-13 April 2006, <http://www.communitycare.co.uk> (Accessed 03.04.08).
- Costello, C.Y (2004) 'Changing Clothes: Gender Inequality and Professional Socialization', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol.16, No.2, pp.138-155.

Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (2009) *Report and Recommendations to the Secretary of State for Health on the conduct function of the General Social Care Council*, [Online]  
[http://www.chre.org.uk/\\_img/pics/library/091104\\_CHRE\\_GSCC\\_review\\_\(Final\\_report\)\\_1.pdf](http://www.chre.org.uk/_img/pics/library/091104_CHRE_GSCC_review_(Final_report)_1.pdf) (Accessed 02.12.09).

Cowburn, M. and Nelson, P. (2007) 'Safe Recruitment, Social Justice, and Ethical Practice: Should People Who Have Criminal Convictions be Allowed to Train as Social Workers?', *Social Work Education*, Vol.27, No.3, pp.293-306.

Currer, C. and Atherton, K. (2008) 'Suitable to Remain a Student Social Worker? Decision Making in Relation to Termination of Training', *Social Work Education*, Vol.27, No.3, pp.279-292.

Davies, M. (1985) *The Essential Social Worker: A Guide to Positive Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Aldershot, Wildwood House Ltd.

Department of Health (1998) *Modernising Social Services: Promoting Independence, Improving Protection, Raising Standards*, London, Stationery Office.

Dillon, J. (2007) 'The Conundrum of Balancing Widening Participation with the Selection of Suitable Students for Social Work Education', *Social Work Education*, Vol.26, No.8, pp.827-841.

Doel, M., Allmark, P., Conway, P., Cowburn, M., Flynn, M., Nelson, P. and Tod, A. (2009) *Professional Boundaries: research report*, General Social Care Council.

Dunning, J. (2010) 'GSCC to be scrapped', *Community Care*, 27 July [Online], <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2010/07/27/114983/GSCC-to-be-scrapped.htm> (Accessed 28.07.10).

Dutton, A. and Worsley, A. (2009) 'Doves and hawks: practice educators' attitudes towards interprofessional learning', *Learning in Health and Social Care*, Vol.8, No.3, pp.145-153.

Edley, N. (2001) 'Analysing Masculinity: Interpretative Repertoires, Ideological Dilemmas and Subject positions' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates, (eds) *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, London, Sage.

Edley, N. and Wetherell, M. (1997) 'Jockeying for Position: The Construction of Masculine Identities', *Discourse and Society*, Vol.8, No.2. pp.203-17.

Edwards, R. and Usher, R. (1994) 'Disciplining the subject: The power of competence', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, Vol.26, No.1, pp. 1-14.

Edwards, R.L., Shera, W., Nelson Reid, P. and York, R. (2006) 'Social Work Practice and Education in the US and Canada', *Social Work Education*, Vol.25, No.1, pp.28-38.

Elliott, J. (2005) *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, London, Sage.

England, H. (1986) *Social Work as Art: Making Good Sense for Practice* London, Allen & Unwin.

Faulkner, D., Swann, J., Baker, S., Bird, M. and Carty, J. (1991) *E621 Methodology Handbook*, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Fargion, S. (2008) 'Reflections on social work's identity: International themes in Italian practitioners' representation of social work', *International Social Work*, Vol.51, No.2, pp. 206-219.

Fawcett, B. (1998) 'Disability and Social Work: Applications from Poststructuralism, Postmodernism and Feminism', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.28, No.2, pp.263-277.

Ferguson, I. (2004) 'Neoliberalism, the Third Way and Social Work: the UK experience' in *Social Work and Society*, Vol. 2, No.1, pp.1-9, [Online] <http://www.socwork.net/> (Accessed 05.07.09).

Fleming, P. (2005) 'Metaphors of Resistance', *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol.19, No.1, pp.45-66.

Fook, J. & Askreland, G. A. (2007) 'Challenges of Critical Reflection - nothing ventured, nothing gained', *Social Work Education* Vol. 26, No. 5, 520-533.

Foucault, M. (1984) 'Truth and Power' in P. Rabinow, (ed) *The Foucault Reader*, London, Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1994a) 'Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of Political Reason' in J.D. Faubion, (ed) *Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, volume 3*, London, Penguin Books.

Foucault, M. (1994b) 'The subject and power', in J.D. Faubion, (ed) *Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, volume 3*, London, Penguin Books.

Francis, B. and Humphreys, J. (2002) 'Professional education as a structural barrier to lifelong learning in the NHS' in F. Reeve, M.Cartwright and R. Edwards, (eds) *Supporting Lifelong Learning, Volume 2: Organizing Learning*, London, RoutledgeFalmer.

Furness, S. & Gilligan, P. (2004) 'Fit for purpose: issues from practice placements, practice teaching and the assessment of students' practice', *Social Work Education*, Vol.23, No.4, pp.465-479.

Furness, S. (2007) 'An Enquiry into Students' Motivations to Train as Social Workers in England', *Journal of Social Work*, Vol.7, No.2, pp.239-253.

Gee, J. P. (1986) 'Units in the production of narrative discourse', *Discourse Processes*, Vol. 9, No.4, pp. 391–422.

General Social Care Council (GSCC) (undated) '*About Us*', General Social Care Council, London, <http://www.gsccl.org.uk/About+us/>.<http://www.gsccl.org.uk/About+us/> (Accessed 19.07.09).

General Social Care Council (GSCC) (2002) *Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers*, London, GSCC.

General Social Care Council (GSCC) (2003) *The General Social Care Council (Conduct) Rules 2003 and Explanatory Notes*, [Online] [www.gsc.org.uk](http://www.gsc.org.uk) (Accessed 19.07.09).

General Social Care Council & the Joint Universities Committee Social Work Education Committee (GSCC & JUC SWEC) (2007) *Suitability for Social Work: Ensuring the Suitability of Social Work Students to Access and Continue Training*, London, GSCC.

General Social Care Council (GSCC) (2008) *Raising standards: Social work conduct in England 2003-2008*, [Online], <http://www.gsc.org.uk/Conduct/Publications+and+useful+documents> (Accessed 12.07.08).

General Social Care Council (GSCC) (2010) *Raising Standards; social work education in England 2008-09*, [Online] [http://www.gsc.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/D1493BD9-3AF1-44D5-AB70-169D239E931D/0/GSCC\\_Raising\\_Standards\\_Report\\_0809.pdf](http://www.gsc.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/D1493BD9-3AF1-44D5-AB70-169D239E931D/0/GSCC_Raising_Standards_Report_0809.pdf) (Accessed 19.09.10).

Gilbert, T.P. (2005) 'Trust and Managerialism: exploring discourses of care', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol.52, No.4, pp.454-463.

Gordon, C. (1994) 'Introduction' in J.D. Faubion, (ed) *Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, Volume 3*, London, Penguin Books.

Hall, S. (1996) 'Who needs 'identity?'' in S. Hall and P. du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London, Sage.

Hall, S. (2001) 'Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates, (eds) *Discourse Theory and Practice: a Reader*, London, Sage.

Harrison, K. and Ruch, G. (2007) 'Social work and the use of self: on becoming and being a social worker', in Lymbery, M. and Postle, K., (eds.) *Social Work: A Companion to Learning*, London, Sage.

Hayes, D. (2008) 'Do practitioners know the limits of inappropriate behaviour', *Community Care*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, [Online] <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2008/09/03/109284/social-workers-confused-on-professional-boundaries.htm> (Accessed 12.12.09)

Hextall, I., Gewirtz, S., Cribb, A. and Mahoney, P. (2007) *Changing Teacher Roles, Identities and Professionalism: An Annotated Bibliography*, [Online] <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/content/1/c6/01/41/56/bibliography.pdf> (Accessed 10.02.10).

Higham, P., Sharp, M. and Booth, C. (2001) 'Changes in the quality and regulation of social work education: confronting the dilemmas of workforce planning and competing qualifications frameworks', *Social Work Education*, Vol.20, No.2, pp.187-198.

Hollway, W. (1984) 'Gender difference and the production of subjectivity' in J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn and V. Walkerdine, (eds) *Changing the Subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity*, London, Methuen and Co.

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently*, London, Sage.

- Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2005) 'Panic and perjury: A psychosocial exploration of agency', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol.44, No.2, pp.147-163.
- Hughes, J., Jewson, N., and Unwin, L. (2007) *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives*, London, Routledge.
- Johnson and Robson (1999) 'Threatened Identities: The Experiences of Women in Transition to Programmes of Professional Higher Education', *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, Vol.9, No.4, pp.273-288.
- Kaiser, R. (2002) 'Fixing Identity by Denying Uniqueness: An Analysis of Professional Identity in Medicine', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, Vol.23, No.2, pp. 95-105.
- Kent, H. (2006) 'Protecting Clients From Harm: The Role of Continuing Professional Education', *Australian Social Work*, Vol.59, No.4, pp. 435-448.
- Kevern, J. and Webb, C. (2004) 'Mature women's experiences of preregistration nurse education', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol.45, No.3, pp.297-306.
- Lafrance, J. and Gray, E. (2004) 'Gate-keeping for professional social work practice', *Social Work Education*, Vol.23, No.3, pp. 325-340.
- Lam, C. M., Wong, H., Leung, T. (2007) 'An unfinished reflexive journey' *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.37, No.1, pp.91-105.
- Langan, M. (2000) 'Social services: managing the third way' in J. Clarke, S. Gewirtz, and E. McLaughlin, (eds) *New Managerialism, New Welfare?*, London, Sage.
- Lapadat, J. and Lindsay, A. (1999) 'Transcription in Research and Practice: From Standardization of Technique to Interpretive Positionings', *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol.5, No.1, pp.64-86
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press.
- Lewis, I. (2004) 'Gender and professional identity: A qualitative study of social workers practising as counsellors and psychotherapists', *Australian Social Work*, Vol.57, No.4, pp.394-407.
- Lindsey, E. (2005) 'Study Abroad and Values Development in Social Work Students', *Journal of Social Work Education*, Vol.41, No.2, pp.229-249.
- Lombard, D. (2008) 'Unison leader: Social work morale at Haringey 'severely damaged'', *Community Care*, 12 October [Online],  
<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2008/12/10/110194/unison-leader-social-work-morale-at-haringey-severely-damaged.htm> (Accessed 19.09.09).
- Lombard, D. (2009) 'Social care regulator slammed over conduct failings', *Community Care*, 4 November [Online],  
<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2009/11/04/113058/social-care-regulator-slammed-over-conduct-failings.htm> (Accessed 19.09.09).

- Lombard, D. (2010) 'Royal Holloway to close social work degree programme', *Community Care*, 4 June [Online], <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2010/06/04/114644/Royal-Holloway-to-close-social-work-degree-programme.htm> (Accessed 28.07.10).
- Lucey, H., Melody, J. and Walkerdine, V. (2003) 'Uneasy Hybrids: psychosocial aspects of becoming educationally successful for working-class young women', *Gender and Education*, Vol.15, No.3, pp.285-299.
- Maclure, M. (1993) 'Arguing for your self: identity as an organising principle in teachers' jobs and lives', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol.19, No.4, pp.311-323.
- Madoc-Jones, I., Bates, J., Facer, B. and Roscoe, K. (2007) 'Students with Criminal Convictions: Policies and Practices in Social Work Education', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.37, No.8, pp.1389-1403.
- Martin, L.H. et al (1988) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, [Online] <http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesOfSelf.en.html> (Accessed 07.05.09).
- McDonald, C., J. Harris and R. Winterstein (2003) 'Contingent on Context? Social Work and the State in Australia, Britain and the USA', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.33, No.2, pp.191-208.
- McLaughlin, H. (2010) "'You've Got to be a Saint to be a Social Worker': The (Mis)operation of Fitness to Practise Processes for Students Already Registered onto English Social Work Training Programmes', *Social Work Education*, Vol.29, No.1, pp.80-95.
- McLaughlin, K. (2007) 'Regulation and Risk in Social Work: The General Social Care Council and the Social Care Register in Context', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.37, No.7, pp.1263-1277.
- McLaughlin, K. (2010) 'The social worker versus the General Social Care Council: an analysis of Care Standards Tribunal hearings and decisions', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.40, No.1, pp.311-327.
- McMichael, A. (2000) 'Professional identity and continuing education: a study of social workers in hospital settings', *Social Work Education*, Vol.19, No.2, pp.175-183.
- McNaron, T. A. H. (2002) 'Coming Out Stories' in C.J. Summers, (ed) *An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture*, [Online] [http://www.glbtc.com/literature/coming\\_out.html](http://www.glbtc.com/literature/coming_out.html) (accessed 07.10.10).
- Molloy, D., Knight, T. and Woodfield, K. (2003) *Diversity in disability: Exploring the interactions between disability, ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality*, Research Report No. 188, Leeds, Department for Work and Pensions.
- Moran, P. Jacobs, C., Bunn, A. and Bifulco, A. (2007) 'Multi-agency working: implications for an early-intervention social work team', *Child and Family Social Work*, Vol.12, No.2., pp.143-151.

- National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Summary Report (Dearing Report)*, London, HMSO.
- Nel, P. (2006) 'Trainee perspectives on their family therapy training', *Journal of Family Therapy*, Vol.28, No.3, pp.307-328.
- Nias, J. (1991) 'Primary teachers talking: a reflexive account of longitudinal research' in G. Walford, (ed) *Doing Educational Research*, London, Routledge.
- Nicoll, K. and Chappell, C. (1998) 'Policy effects: "flexible learning" in higher education and the "de-differentiation" of the vocational sector', *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 20, No.1, pp.39-50.
- Nicoll, K. and Harrison, R. (2003) 'Constructing the Good Teacher in Higher Education: the discursive work of standards', *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol.25, No.1, pp.23-35.
- O'Farrell, C. (2005) *Michel Foucault*, London, Sage.
- O'Neill, S. (1999) 'Social Work - a profession?', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, Vol.13, No.1, pp.9-18.
- Orme, J. and Rennie, G. (2006) 'The role of registration in ensuring ethical practice', *International Social Work* Vol.49, No.3 pp.333-344.
- Parker, A. & Tritter, J. (2006) 'Focus group method and methodology: current practice and recent debate', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, Vol.29, No.1, pp.23-37.
- Payne, M. (2002) 'The role and achievement of a professional association in the late twentieth century: The British Association of Social Workers 1970-2000', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.32, No.8, pp 969-995.
- Pearl, D. (2008) *Transforming tribunals: Implementing part 1 of the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2000: Response by the members of the Care Standards Tribunal*, London, Ministry of Justice.
- Peim, N. (2009) 'Thinking resources for educational research methods and methodology', *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, Vol.32, No 3, pp.235-248.
- Perry, Richard W. (2004) 'The Impact of Criminal Conviction Disclosure on the Self-reported Offending Profile of Social Work Students', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.34, No.7, pp.997-1008.
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*, London, Sage.
- Powell, J. and Gilbert, T. (2007) 'Performativity and helping professions: social theory, power and practice', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, Vol.16. No.3, pp.193-201.
- Preston-Shoot, M. (2000) 'Stumbling towards oblivion or discovering new horizons? Observations on the relationship between social work education and practice', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, Vol.14, No.2, pp.87-98.



- Preston-Shoot, M. (2004) 'Responding by degrees: surveying the education and practice landscape', *Social Work Education*, Vol.23, No.6, pp.667-692.
- Quinney, A., Hutchings, M. and Scammell, J. (2008) 'Student and Staff Experiences of Using a Virtual Community, Wessex Bay, to Support Interprofessional Learning: Messages for Collaborative Practice', *Social Work Education*, Vol.27, No.6, pp.658-664.
- Rai, L. (2006) 'Owning (up to) reflective writing in social work education', *Social Work Education*, Vol.25, No.8, pp.785-797.
- Reay, D. (1998) 'Always knowing' and 'never being sure': familial and institutional habituses and higher education choice', *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol.13, No.4, pp.519-529.
- Reay, D. (2003) 'A Risky Business? Mature Working-class Women Students and Access to Higher Education', *Gender and Education*, Vol.15, No.3, 301-317.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G., and Clayton, J. (2010) 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': working-class students in UK higher education', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol.36, No.1, pp.107-124.
- Regehr, C., Stalker, C.A., Jacobs, M. and Pelech, W. (2001) 'The Gatekeeper and the Wounded Healer', *The Clinical Supervisor*, Vol.20, No.1, pp.127-143.
- Reynolds, J. and Wetherell, M. (2003) 'The Discursive Climate of Singleness: The Consequences for Women's Negotiation of a Single Identity', *Feminism and Psychology*, Vol.13, No.4, pp.489-510.
- Reynolds, J. (2007) 'Discourses of Inter-Professionalism' in *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.37, No.3, pp.441-457.
- Scheider and Netting (1999) 'Influencing Social Policy in a Time of Devolution: Upholding Social Work's Great Tradition', *Social Work*, Vol.44, No.4, pp.349-357.
- Seden, J. (2011) 'The use of self and relationship: swimming against the tide?' in J. Seden, S. Matthews, M. McCormick, and A. Morgan, (eds) *Professional Development in Social Work: Complex Issues in Practice*, Abingdon, Routledge.
- Sellers, S.L., & Hunter, A.G. (2005) 'Private pain, public choices: influence of problems in the family of origin on career choices among a cohort of MSW students', *Social Work Education*, Vol.24, No.8, pp. 869-881.
- Smith, M. J. (1998) *Social science in question*, London, Sage.
- Social Issues Research Centre (undated) *Social and Cultural Aspects of Drinking: A report to the Amsterdam Group*, [Online] [http://www.sirc.org/publik/drinking\\_biblio\\_n\\_z.html](http://www.sirc.org/publik/drinking_biblio_n_z.html) (Accessed 31.07.09)
- Social Work Task Force (2009) *Building a Safe, Confident Future: the final report of the Social Work Taskforce*, [Online] <http://publications.education.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/01114-2009DOM-EN.pdf> (Accessed 06.01.10).

- Søreide, G.E. (2007) 'The public face of teacher identity – narrative construction of teacher identity in public policy documents', *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol.22, No.2, pp.129-146.
- Strauss, H. (2008) 'Regional Perspectives: Social work in the Nordic countries: Contemporary trends and shifts in education and policy', *International Social Work*, Vol.51, No.2, pp.253–261.
- Stroh, M. (2000) 'Qualitative Interviewing' in D. Burton, (ed) *Research Training for Social Scientists: a Handbook for Postgraduate Researchers*, London, Sage.
- Taylor, C. (2006) 'Narrating Significant Experience: Reflective Accounts and the Production of (Self) Knowledge', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol.36, No.2, pp.189-209.
- Taylor, S.J. and Bogdan, R. (1998) *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: a Guidebook and Resource*, New York, John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Taylor, S. (2001a) 'Locating and Conducting Discourse Analytic Research' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates, (eds) *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, London, Sage.
- Taylor, S. (2001b) 'Evaluating and Applying Discourse Analytic Research' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates, (eds) *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, London, Sage.
- Taylor, S. and Littleton, K., (2006) 'Biographies in talk: A narrative-discursive research approach', *Qualitative Sociology Review*, Vol.2, No.1, [Online]  
[http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive\\_eng.php](http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php), (Accessed 11.02.10).
- Taylor, S. and Littleton, K. (2008) 'Art work or money: Conflicts in the construction of a creative identity', *The Sociological Review*, Vol.56, No.2, pp.275-292.
- Tennant, M. (2009) 'Lifelong learning as a technology of the self', in K. Illeris, (ed) *Contemporary Theories of Learning*, London, Routledge.
- The Open University (2005) *Doctorate in Education Programme Guide*, Milton Keynes, The Open University.
- Tight, M. (1998) 'Education, Education, Education! The Vision of Lifelong Learning in the Kennedy, Dearing and Fryer Reports', *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol.24, No.4, pp.473-486.
- Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services UK Partnership (TOPSS) (2002) *National Occupational Standards for Social Work*. Leeds, TOPSS.
- Usher, R., Bryant, I. and Johnston, R. (1997) *Adult Education and the Postmodern Challenge: Learning Beyond the Limits*, London, Routledge.
- Ward, A. (2008) 'Beyond the instructional mode: creating a holding environment for learning about the use of self', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, Vol.22, No.1, pp.67-83.

- Warde, B. (2009) 'Male Social Workers in Child Welfare: A Qualitative Analysis', *Child Welfare*, Vol.88, No.4, pp 113-133.
- Watkinson, A.M. and Chalmers, D. (2008) 'Disability, Professional Unsuitability and the Profession of Social Work: A Case Study', *Social Work Education*, Vol.27, No.5, pp.504-518.
- Watson, C. (2006) 'Narratives of practice and the construction of identity in teaching', *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, Vol.12, No 5, pp.509–526.
- Watson, S. (2000) 'Foucault and the Study of Social Policy', in G. Lewis, S. Gewirtz and J. Clarke, *Rethinking Social Policy*, London, Sage.
- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: learning, meaning and identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Wetherell, M. (1998) 'Positioning and interpretative repertoires: conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue', *Discourse & Society* Vol.9, No.3, pp. 387-412.
- Wetherell, M. (2001a) 'Foundations and Building Blocks: Editor's Introduction' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates, (eds) *Discourse Theory and Practice: a Reader*, London, Sage.
- Wetherell, M. (2001b) 'Themes in Discourse Research: The case of Diana' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates, (eds) *Discourse Theory and Practice: a Reader*, London, Sage.
- Wetherell, M. (2001c) 'Minds, Selves and Sense-Making: Editor's Introduction' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J. Yates, (eds) *Discourse Theory and Practice: a Reader*, London, Sage.
- Wetherell, M. (2003) 'Paranoia, Ambivalence, and Discursive Practices: Concepts of Position and Positioning in Psychoanalysis and Discursive Psychology' in R. Harre, and F. Moghaddam, (eds) *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political and Cultural Contexts*, Westport, Praeger Publishers.
- Wetherell, M. (2005) 'Unconscious conflict or everyday accountability?' in *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol.44, No.2, pp.169-173.
- Wetherell, M. and Edley, N. (1999) 'Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices' in *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol.9, No.3, pp.335–356.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. and Yates, S.J. (2001) (eds) *Discourse Theory and Practice: a Reader*, London, Sage.
- Wiles, F. (2010) 'Blurring Private-Professional Boundaries: Does it Matter? Issues in Researching Social Work Students' Perceptions About Professional Regulation', *Ethics and Social Welfare*, First published on: 24 November 2010 (iFirst).
- Wiles, F. (2011) 'A social worker in work or outside work: the benefits and dilemmas of registration' in J. Seden, S. Matthews, M. McCormick, and A. Morgan, (eds) *Professional Development in Social Work: Complex Issues in Practice*, Abingdon, Routledge.

Wilkinson, S. (1998) 'Focus Groups in Feminist Research: Power, Interaction, and the Co-construction of Meaning', *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol.21, No.1, pp.111-126.

Witkin, S. (1999) 'Identities and Contexts', *Social Work*, Vol.44, No 4, pp.293-297.

Wong, Y. and Pearson, V. (2007) 'Mission Possible; Building Social Work Professional Identity through Fieldwork Placements in China', *Social Work Education*, Vol.26, No.3, pp.292-310.

Wray, J., Fell, B., Stanley, N., Manthorpe, J., and Coyne, E. (2005), *Final Report of The PEdDS Project: disabled social work students and placements*, University of Hull, [Online] <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds/>, (accessed 10.05.06).

Yam, B. (2004) 'From vocation to profession: the quest for professionalization of nursing', *British Journal of Nursing*, Vol.13, No.16, pp.978-982.

Youdell, D. (2006) 'Diversity, Inequality, and a Post-structuralist Politics for Education' in *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*. Vol 27, No.1 pp. 33-42.

## Appendices

1	Pilot study: focus group – vignettes and summary of findings (2007/2008)	211
2	Summary of themes and discourses in Care Standards Tribunal decisions about registered social workers	215
3	Invitation letter and information sheet	223
4	Application to ethical panel	226
5	Brief biographical details of participants	231
6	Interview schedule (with prompts)	232
7	Consent form	234
8	Record Your Call information sheet (extract)	235
9	Interviews: summary of interpretative repertoires and recurring themes	236
10	Example of interview transcript ('Lynne')	239

### **Pilot study: Focus group vignettes and summary of findings (2007/8)**

Two vignettes - based on real conduct cases - were used to stimulate exploration of situations in which the boundary between private and professional life was blurred. They were constructed to include a certain amount of ambiguity. A shortened description of the scenarios is followed by a table showing a summary of the interpretative repertoires which emerged from the discussion. When I presented this information at a conference, a colleague from another social work course asked to use the vignettes for teaching purposes, in return for sending me the discussion notes. These are included at the end of the appendix.

#### ***Vignette A***

*Alec is employed as a social worker in adult mental health services. He has been under a lot of stress due to the break up of his marriage. His GP signs him off on sick leave for two weeks. During this time Alec joins a creative writing group where he meets Beth, who tells him that she has been treated for mental health problems in the past. Alec and Beth's friendship develops into a sexual relationship, although she continues to live with her partner. Alec returns to work, and after a while is asked to cover a colleague's caseload. Alec is taken aback to discover that his colleague was Beth's social worker.*

*Alec says nothing at work, but decides to end the relationship with Beth. She gets very upset and takes an overdose. Beth tells her partner about Alec, and he informs Alec's line manager. Alec's employers suspend him and initiate internal disciplinary proceedings. Meanwhile, Beth makes a complaint to the GSCC who begin an investigation. Alec asks the GSCC to take into account his previously good record as a social worker, and the stress he had been under. He believes he should be allowed to continue as a social worker.*

#### ***Vignette B***

*Sally is a qualified social worker in an adult assessment team. Julie, her line manager, has been approached by two of Sally's colleagues, who complain that Sally is spending a lot of time on the internet during work time, accessing her private emails from work. When everyone has gone home, Julie takes a look around Sally's desk. Under some papers she finds several printed out emails from Sally's personal email account. These indicate that Sally is working for an escort agency which provides male clients with female 'companions'. Looking at the agency's website and the emails, Julie suspects that Sally is actually working as a prostitute. The next day, Julie tells Sally she will have to share this information with more senior managers. She also says she is wondering whether to report Sally to the GSCC.*

## Summary of findings: interpretative repertoires with associated subject positions

Interpretative repertoire	Subject positions
Professionalism: certain kinds of behaviour contravenes social work values/ professionalism.	Social workers as employees/ people with professional status and responsibilities.
Upholding the profession	Some social workers as not upholding professional status (ie Sally)
Public/ other people's opinions are a factor in determining the 'wrongness' or seriousness of an action	The public/ the media as audience.  Position self as a member of the public (taxpayer)
Protection and risk: there is a need to protect people who are at risk.	Service users as vulnerable
Social workers should maintain clear boundaries between relationships with service users and other kinds of social relationships.	Service users and social workers positioned as 'other'
Social workers are human and make mistakes (but this is ok if they are prepared to rectify/ overcome them).  You are only responsible for what you know / can't be blamed if you didn't know the full story.  Social workers must be honest about their actions /mistakes (but equally would expect a 'second chance')  Social work is a profession which gives people a second chance	Social workers as fallible Sally and Alec need support     Social workers as capable of changing / making amends for their behaviour
Managers have the right/ duty to deal with problems at a local level.  Workers are expected to 'pull their weight' in a team.	Position self and others (Sally) as employees /  Position (self) or others as managers
External authority: recognition of some kind of external authority which reduces a manager's autonomy at the local level	Position GSCC as higher authority (but not unquestioningly)

People are entitled to their private space/ privacy (even at work).	Social workers as private people – not social workers all the time (hence multiple identities)
	Positioning self as a student in relation to the vignette
	Positioning self as a social worker (or possibly a manager) in relation to the vignette



**Notes from colleague at another university, showing social work students' responses to the vignettes (teaching session)**

**Vignette A (Alec)**

**Ethical Issues**

- Didn't inform – she should have been taken off caseload
- Personal life vs. professionalism
- Denying Beth support

1. No input as a social worker to Beth's case

Unaware she was service user

Stress

Tried to break up her relationship

2. Denial, lying

Ignore needs of service user

Stress excuse

Lack of integrity with other social workers

**Vignette B (Sally)**

**Ethical Issues**

- Evidence – is it sufficient?
- Personal vs. professional
- ? Legal activity
- Disrepute of organisation
- Clients might recognise
- Trust of service users – 'moral authority', role model, integrity
- Privacy

1. Doesn't affect quality of her practice

Evidence – could be 'false' e-mail

Spare time – enjoyment

Always careful

Not a prostitute

'Witch hunt' - character assassination

2. Team moral consensus against escort agencies

Exploiting colleagues – wasting work time

Protection relationship of social worker, profession without public

Social worker should be 'responsible'

**Summary of themes and discourses in Care Standards Tribunal decisions about registered social workers****Introduction**

This summary of findings is provided as background information for my analysis of appeals against GSCC decisions, discussed in chapter 2. It has been adapted from a paper presented to the Social Policy Association conference in 2009, and the full paper, 'Private lives and professional suitability: themes and discourses in Care Standards Tribunal decisions about registered social workers' can be found on the website: <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/spa2009>.

**Context**

In 2008, the GSCC published a report on its conduct function, which revealed that, between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 and 31 March 2008, seventeen social workers were removed or suspended from the GSCC register on the grounds of professional unsuitability. A further sixteen social workers were admonished (publically cautioned) due to issues arising with their conduct. Thirty-nine social workers were temporarily suspended while the GSCC investigated their case (General Social Care Council, 2008a).

The Care Standards Tribunal (CST) considers appeals against decisions made under various pieces of legislation which regulate health, education and social care. This includes decisions made by the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and the Care Council for Wales in respect of social workers. The CST has nineteen legal members and sixty nine 'specialist' (lay) members, and is presided over by a Senior Circuit Judge (Pearl, 2008). The specialist members are selected in accordance with certain requirements including experience and qualifications relevant to the cases under discussion. Reports of all appeal decisions can be found on the CST's public website.

## **Method**

The data was obtained from an examination of the CST's public website (<http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk/>) undertaken between January - May 2009. The website contains information about all CST decisions, and I selected the categories relevant to the registration of social workers. This gave me an overview of the number and types of appeal that had been lodged, in England and Wales, between December 2006 (when the first appeal was made) and February 2009 (the latest appeal for which a report was available at the time of my analysis). During this period there had been forty-four appeals against GSCC decisions. The majority (thirty-one) were made by people whose applications to register with the General Social Care Council (GSCC) had been turned down. A further four related to suspensions / interim suspensions of registered social workers, and nine to removal from the register.

The next step was to briefly read all forty-four reports and disregard those which did not seem to be directly related to conduct. Of the twenty-three reports disregarded, a third concerned disputes about qualifications; two did not progress to a full hearing due to procedural problems; and the others were made by previously registered social workers who had failed to renew their registration within the permitted timescale. In all the remaining twenty-one cases, suitability was questioned on account of conduct, competence or health. Of these, eight appeals were upheld (that is, the appellant won the appeal and the GSCC's decision was overturned) and thirteen were dismissed (meaning that the GSCC's decision remained unaltered). This overview is summarised in the table below – the categories used here are a subjective judgement based on the way the case has been reported, and there are overlaps, for example between conduct/ competence/ health issues. Of the twenty-one cases, thirteen appeals were from male social workers and eight from female workers. This is a much higher proportion of men, given the predominance of

women in social work. It is not possible to reliably report on ethnicity and age, as these characteristics are not always explicit from the reports.

**Table 1: Cases selected for analysis**

	<b>Appeal upheld (GSCC decision overturned)</b>	<b>Appeal dismissed (GSCC decision unaltered)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Inappropriate relationship with a service user	2 (includes 1 with conditions)	3	5
Not competent due to mental health issues	1	1	2
Competence	1	0	1
Conduct (criminal or disciplinary offences)	2	9	11
Conduct/ competence	1	0	1
Conduct/ mental health issues	1	0	1
Total	8	13	21

Finally I selected twelve reports for a detailed analysis, with a view to getting a more or less equal spread between upheld and dismissed cases. Of these, five related to female workers and seven to men. To analyse the reports, I drew my method from Jean Carabine's (2001:280) Foucauldian genealogical approach to discourse analysis, which starts from the idea that 'knowledge, truth and discourse are all socially constructed and historically specific'. In particular she advises examining texts to identify

- themes and categories which [relate to] the discourse
- inter-relationships between discourses
- the discursive strategies and techniques that are used
- absences and silences
- resistances and counter-discourses
- the effects of the discourse.

I also reflected on the discursive resources used to construct the Tribunal’s decision, and considered how people were constructed as subjects in the discourse. The findings are summarised in the table that follows.

**Analysis of the reports: interpretative repertoires and discursive strategies, with extracts and examples from the CST reports.**

<p><b><i>Misconduct is about a lack of integrity</i></b></p> <p>The panel takes into account that the stated purpose of registration is to ‘uphold public trust’:</p> <p>‘We have come to the conclusion that misconduct is about lack of integrity and how an individual is perceived by others: if someone cannot be trusted in this part of their lives, where else are they not to be trusted? The answer might be that they are utterly trustworthy elsewhere, of course, but that does not matter because we believe that once doubt has been cast on how they are seen by others, the damage is done. It may be said by outsiders that if one person has done this and been allowed to get away with it, maybe others have done the same. It calls into question the whole credibility of the system’ (Care Standards Tribunal, 2006a, para.13).</p> <p>CB’s initial denial of having a relationship with a service user leads the panel to have ‘considerable doubts as to his integrity and his preparedness to be open with his line managers when facing difficulties (Care Standards Tribunal, 2007b, para 18).</p> <p>On the other hand, although VL initially conceals her relationship with a service user, she nevertheless wins her appeal because:</p> <p>‘[her initial deception] did not, in the Tribunal’s judgment, indicate a general propensity to deceive. The Applicant’s desire to continue to earn her living by working with children and their families and her sincere and well-founded belief that she had much to offer drove her to hide the truth on this occasion but she has, on many other occasions, demonstrated an ability to be frank, open and honest’ (Care Standards Tribunal, 2008b, para 56).</p> <p>Similarly, DSH was considered to have ‘acted foolishly, crossed boundaries and had an inappropriate relationship with J’, and yet:</p> <p>‘However weak and foolish this may have been it was not done with ulterior or hidden motives. He had strong feelings for J, wanted to help her and was prepared to stand by her to the end. He has an exemplary work record, supportive references and this was an isolated incident’ (Care Standards Tribunal, 2008a, paragraph 54).</p>
<p><b><i>Determining misconduct is contingent on public attitudes.</i></b></p> <p>The panel acknowledges that there may be ‘a grey area’ in which a ‘reasonable dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable is more difficult to draw’ because ‘[what] to some people would be considered normal, everyday behaviour, could be regarded as morally reprehensible by other[s]’ (Care Standards Tribunal, 2006a, para 15).</p>

***Committing a criminal offence is synonymous with misconduct. On the other hand, the sanction depends on seriousness of the offence.***

In CB v. GSCC, the panel examines the GSCC's conduct rules and decides that:

'[Rule] 13(1)(c) should be read as providing that a finding that there has been a conviction is to be taken as a finding of misconduct' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2007b, para10).

On the other hand:

'[Criminal] offences vary in seriousness and some have less relevance to a person's suitability to practise as a social worker than others' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2007b, para 12).

In BA v. GSCC, the Tribunal takes into account that the offences (which mainly consist of drink driving and criminal damage) took place some years ago. They also consider BA's explanation about the circumstances surrounding the offences, and conclude that his behaviour:

'[does] not in our opinion amount to a lack of good character within the statutory requirements for registration. We find no basis to suggest that ... his registration would place the public at risk [or] damage the reputation of the social work profession' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2007a, para 31).

***Social workers should behave as role models.***

Working in social care, an individual is working with vulnerable clients. .... This places on an individual a responsibility. A responsibility to behave appropriately and to be above reproach, "whiter than white", to be that role model and not to let people down is a reasonable expectation of a professional' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2006a, para 18).

***Privacy is subservient to the 'public interest'***

In the case of DSH v. GSCC, in which a social worker had a six week sexual relationship with an adult service user, the Tribunal accepts the GSCC's argument that in becoming registered, social workers bring their private life into contact with their public life, and therefore:

'any 'right' to an unrestricted social life must give way to the wider public interest in ensuring that professionals do not present a risk to service users' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2008a, p.13)

***Risk is conceptualised as the harm that a social worker might do to a service user.***

The GSCC (General Social Care Council, 2008a: 25) describes its regulatory role as 'addressing poor practice and taking action where necessary [to] ...provide protection for people who use services'.

Risk is only considered in relation to service users, not other members of the public. Thus, VL's relatively recent caution for the offence of 'common assault following an altercation with a railway employee' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2008b, para 31) is not given any weight in the Tribunal's decision.

In YD v. GSCC, a significant factor in the CST's decision, to suspend rather than remove her from the register, was that no service users had been put at risk by the social worker's behaviour.

The same reasoning can be seen in the CST's decision not to overturn the GSCC's suspension of CB, who had been imprisoned under section 38 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 because he had unlawfully had a sexual relationship with a woman who used mental health services.

On the other hand, despite the statement, in the GSCC Codes of Practice (2002, code 5.4) that social care workers must not '[form] inappropriate personal relationships with service users', in BA v. GSCC, and in VL v. GSCC, the social workers declared criminal offences which did not lead to a decision of unsuitability. Similarly the relationships that VL and DSH developed with service users did not – after consideration – render them professionally unsuitable.

***Risk involves constructing service users as 'vulnerable'.***

It has been argued (McLaughlin, 2007) that demonstrating that a social worker presents a risk depends to some extent on constructing service users as vulnerable. In the cases of CB and DSH, although the relationships are described as consensual (and initiated by the other party), the female service users are represented as dependent and emotionally fragile on account of their mental health conditions.

On the other hand, in the case of VL, a female social worker who has a relationship with a male service user, the service user is presented as active and powerful:

'Mr D invited the Applicant to come to his home in the evening to "discuss important matters" and then persuaded her to share a meal with him. Mr D then further persuaded the Applicant to stay and to have sexual intercourse with him. The Applicant expressed her reluctance to become involved with Mr D in this way but found herself unable to resist his advances' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2008b paras 9, 10).

***Little attention is given to risks to which social workers might be subject themselves.***

In the case of VL, the panel attempts to explore whether she had been physically coerced by Mr D., but this is done to establish the extent of her 'guilt' rather than out of concern for her welfare.

In the case of BA, it is reported that the GSCC considered that his alcohol dependence might pose a risk for service users who might travel in his car; whereas the personal implications of his mental health issues were not seen as a concern:

'The potential for the applicant's depression to have a direct negative impact on service users is low as he internalises his distress until it has to be expressed in some manner resulting, in the worse circumstance, in self-harm' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2007a, para13).

***The evaluation of risk is reduced when the appellant expresses remorse.***

Concerns appear to be reduced when the social worker can demonstrate that he or she has reflected on the incident, accepted their culpability and is unlikely to re-offend. Both DSH and CB had relationships with service users and were found to be unsuitable for registration by the GSCC, but whereas CB lost his appeal, DSH was successful because:

'In giving evidence the Appellant showed remorse for his actions and a willingness to attend training courses to fully understand the boundaries that a social worker must

work within. He said that his life has [been] and is about being a social worker. We see little risk that he will ever make such an error of judgement again' (Care Standards Tribunal, 2008a, para 55).

### ***Risk to the reputation of the profession***

In *EMM v. GSCC*, the Tribunal rested its decision partly on precedents set by the Law Society<sup>13</sup>, another regulatory body, in the case *Bolton v. Law Society* [1994]. This decision ruled that although sanctions might sometimes have a 'punitive element', there were also two other purposes: to deter others and to protect the reputation of the profession. The CST reports cites the following:

'The second purpose is the most fundamental of all: to maintain the reputation of the ... profession as one in which every member, of whatever standing, may be trusted to the ends of the earth. To maintain this reputation and sustain public confidence in the integrity of the profession it is often necessary that those guilty of serious lapses are not only expelled but denied re-admission.

... The reputation of the profession is more important than the fortunes of any individual member. Membership of a profession brings many benefits, but that is a part of the price' (*Bolton v. Law Society* [1994] 1 W.L.R. 512 cited in Care Standards Tribunal 2007c, para 35)

### **References**

Carabine, J. (2001) 'Unmarried motherhood 1830 – 1990: A Genealogical Analysis' in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, and S.J.Yates.,(eds) *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, London, Sage in association with The Open University.

Care Standards Tribunal (2006a) *YD v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (Accessed December 2008).

Care Standards Tribunal (2007a) *Ben Neil De Almeida v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (Accessed December 2008).

Care Standards Tribunal (2007b) *Christopher Bradford v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (Accessed December 2008).

Care Standards Tribunal (2007c) *Evelyn Muthoni Mnene v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (Accessed December 2008).

Care Standards Tribunal (2008a) *DSH v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (Accessed December 2008).

Care Standards Tribunal (2008b) *VL v The General Social Care Council*, [www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.carestandardtribunal.gov.uk) (Accessed March 2008).

---

<sup>13</sup> The regulation of solicitors in England and Wales is now undertaken by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA)



General Social Care Council (2002) *Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers and Employers*, London, General Social Care Council, [Online], [http://www.gsccl.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/041E6261-6BB0-43A7-A9A4-80F658D2A0B4/0/Codes\\_of\\_Practice.pdf](http://www.gsccl.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/041E6261-6BB0-43A7-A9A4-80F658D2A0B4/0/Codes_of_Practice.pdf) (Accessed 24 February 2008).

General Social Care Council (2008) *Raising standards: Social work conduct in England 2003-2008*, London, General Social Care Council, [Online], <http://www.gsccl.org.uk/Conduct/Publications+and+useful+documents> (Accessed 12.07.08).

McLaughlin, K. (2007) 'Revisiting the public/private divide: Theoretical, political and personal implications of their unification', *Practice*, Vol.19, no.4, pp. 241- 253.

Pearl, D. (2008) *Transforming tribunals: Implementing part 1 of the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2000: Response by the members of the Care Standards Tribunal*, London, Ministry of Justice.

### **Invitation letter and information sheet**

March 2009

Dear student,

#### **Research into social work education and professional registration**

I'm writing to invite you to take part in some research we are doing into social work students' perspectives on / experiences of professional registration.

With this letter you will find an information sheet written by the researcher, Fran Wiles. She is studying the processes of professional registration and how these affect students' sense of themselves as social workers. This research is being undertaken for Fran's Doctorate in Education, and I believe it will make a valuable contribution to the development of the social work programme. Fran would like to interview a small number of social work students between March and May 2009, at a place and time convenient to them.

This letter is going out to all students in your region. The research has approval from the University's Student Panel, and Ethical Panel. I must emphasise that taking part is entirely voluntary, and that the interviews will be confidential. I appreciate how busy you are, but if you can spare an hour or so and are interested in taking part, I know Fran will be very happy to hear from you - you will find her contact details on the information sheet.

Yours sincerely,

Professor X, Director of Social Work

#### **Research into social work education and professional registration**

Dear student,

I'm looking for people who might be interested in taking part in my research. I'm a second year postgraduate student on the Doctorate in Education programme. As you will read below, I'm also employed by the Social Work programme, but must emphasise that I would not be interviewing students in this capacity. The research has permission from the University's Student Panel and Ethics Committee.

I would like to interview a number of social work students between March and May 2009, at a place and time convenient to them. In the interviews I would like to find out about students' experiences of professional registration - that is becoming and remaining registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC); their experiences of developing a sense of themselves as a social worker; and - if it seems relevant to participants - about any links between professional identity and personal identity. When I have completed the research, I hope it will contribute to developing the social work programme.

These topics are of potential interest to all social work students – you all invest a considerable amount in working towards a qualification and developing your professional identity. I look forward to hearing from any of you who are interested in talking about your experiences of, and thoughts about, professional registration. As you know, all students complete a detailed application form to join the GSCC social care register. For some of you this will have been straightforward, while others will have experienced anxieties or complications – for example, to do with CRB checks, work history or health issues. Alternatively, something might have happened on the course (including your placement) or in your personal or working life which raised issues to do with your GSCC registration. In any of these situations, you may have had to go through some kind of investigation or things may have been resolved quite quickly. Regardless of the actual outcome, the anxieties can be very real. I appreciate that some of you might find these topics emotive. If you are interested in the research but would like to find out a bit more, you are welcome to contact me for an initial chat without committing yourself further.

If you choose to take part, I will ask you to fill in a consent form (a copy is enclosed for information). You can 'opt out' at any point by simply saying so. I will need to tape-record the discussion, and I will transcribe the interviews and offer to send you a copy for comment. I will need to write about the interviews, as part of my assessed work and in my final thesis. In due course I also hope to write an article for publication about the research as a whole, and this may refer back to the interviews. I will, of course, observe confidentiality and ensure that all references to interviewees are completely anonymised. Generalised feedback from the research (not individual data), about ways in which the social work programme may be developed, will be shared with relevant colleagues.

### **About myself**

Although I am doing this in my role as a post-graduate student, I am also a full-time member of University staff. I am a social work lecturer and the Assistant Director of Social Work (Professional Practice). I'm also a member of the X and X course teams.

I am a qualified social worker and have worked in a variety of social work roles. In my own time, I am a tutor on one of the Openings courses.

### **Confidentiality**

Please be reassured that you will not be obliged to talk about anything which makes you feel uncomfortable. I will keep my research role separate from my work role. Your confidentiality will be maintained, and nothing about individuals will be passed on to the social work programme.

In accordance with the ethical guidelines for my research, I need to add that in rare and exceptional cases – as you will be aware from studying [courses] – this confidentiality rule might need to be reconsidered. This would include, for example, if a student were to disclose sensitive information which they have not previously

made known during their application to study for the social work degree, or during GSCC registration. I appreciate this is very unlikely to happen; but if it did, I would follow the guidance outlined in section 8 of the course Assessment Guides.

**Want to take part? And/ or do you have any questions?**

If you are willing to take part, or if you have any questions, please contact me in one of the following ways:

- Return the attached form to me c/o The University
- Email me at xxx
- Phone me (xxx)
- Phone or text my mobile (xxx)

Thanks for reading this - I hope to hear from you.

Fran Wiles

March 2009

---

Reply form:

Name

Email / phone number to arrange an interview

I am interested in taking part in the research: YES / NO

I would like more information: YES /NO

Please return to Fran Wiles (ADDRESS)

## APPLICATION TO THE ETHICAL PANEL

Please complete and send to:

**Xxxx**, Chair,  
Ethics Committee

If you have any queries before you fill in this form please look at the Research Ethics (intranet) web site: xxxx

**Title of project**

*A short, descriptive title.*

Doctorate of Education project title: The impact of professional registration on social work students' concept of 'self'.

**Schedule**

*Time frame for the research and its data collection phase(s).*

I would like to write to potential participants in mid/late March, with a view to conducting 5-10 interviews between late March and the end of April 2009, and a further 10-15 interviews between June and December 2009.

This would enable me to complete an initial stage of data collection by the end of May 2009 (and report on this for EdD purposes at the beginning of June), and to complete the remaining data collection and analysis by the end of December 2009.

**Abstract**

A summary of the main points of the research, understandable by a non-specialist.

I am registered for the 3 year Doctorate in Education, and am currently in my second year. The focus of my Ed D research is to explore whether and how the discourse of professional regulation affects social work students' professional and personal identities. The research questions being explored are:

1. What discourses do students draw on when talking about social work education and their expectations about being qualified?
2. What discourses do students draw on to describe themselves in private life and as developing professionals?
3. What discourses do students draw on when talking about the regulatory process (including their own experience if relevant)?
4. Do students perceive any personal consequences of their transition from 'lay person' (unqualified) to 'social worker' (qualified)?

### Source(s) of funding

Details of the external or internal funding body (e.g. ESRC, MRC).

Self funded

### Justification for research

What contribution to knowledge, policy, practice, and people's lives the research will make?

From April 2005, all qualified social workers and students in England have had to register with the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and 'sign up to' a code of practice. Recent academic debates about registration have mainly been concerned with universities' responsibility for determining and monitoring applicants' suitability for social work education. However, very little appears to have been published so far about professional registration from the individual perspective. And yet, signing up to the code of practice has potential implications for social workers' behaviour in private life as well as at work (Clark 2006). I would like to find out whether and how the discourse of professional regulation affects social work students' sense of themselves as professionals and as people.

In the research project as a whole, I hope to be able to draw out some practical implications for the social work programme, including the curriculum and the operation of selection and suitability processes. I also hope that this research may be able to contribute to the professional and academic debates briefly indicated above.

### Investigators

Give names and units of all persons involved in the collection and handling of individual data. Please name one person as Principal Investigator (PI).

No-one will be collecting and handling individual data apart from myself.

### Published ethical guidelines to be followed

For example: BERA, BPS, BSA (see Research Ethics web site for more information).

BERA

### Location(s) of data collection

*Give details of where and when data will be collected. If on private, corporate or institutional premises, indicate what approvals are gained/required.*

I would like to conduct a maximum of 20 interviews between March and December 2009, which are likely to be with students in regions (details). Where possible, these will take

place in the student's workplace or the regional office. If it is necessary to conduct interviews in the student's home, health and safety guidance would be followed and I would leave full details with my partner or a regional colleague.

Permission would be negotiated when participants come forward, for example in relation to workplaces it would be for the student to gain permission from their line manager. For interviews in the regional office I will consult the staff tutor in the first instance.

### **Participants**

Give details of the population from which you will be sampling and how this sampling will be done.

All second and third level social work students (those who have completed [course] and [course] in up to four regions (details) - estimated to be about 230 students – will be invited to take part between March and December 2009. As the response rate is unclear, only two regions would be contacted initially, where I already have the support of staff tutors. However, depending on the response rate it may be necessary to negotiate support from the other two regions. It is important to have the support of staff tutors, not least because for ethical reasons, students will not be included if there is an unresolved suitability / conduct issue under investigation.

### **Recruitment procedures**

How will you identify and approach potential participants?

Each student from the above courses and regions (and subject to permission from the Student Panel) will be sent an 'open' letter which includes details about the research and invites potential participants to contact me. In addition to the open invitation, I would like to try and recruit participants through the staff tutors, as they may know of students who would be interested /willing to talk to me. For ethical reasons (see above) it will be advisable to liaise with staff tutors to ensure that students with an unresolved suitability / conduct issue under investigation are not contacted.

### **Consent**

*Give details of how informed consent will be gained and attach copies of information sheet(s) and consent form(s). Give details of how participants can withdraw consent and what will happen to their data in such a case (see the Research Ethics web site for an advisory document).*

In my initial letter (attached) I will give potential participants clear information about the research and my role on the social work programme, and give strong assurances about anonymity and confidentiality. This letter advises potential participants of the possibly emotive nature of the material I will be asking them to talk about. It also clarifies that because of my professional role I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality, and refers to advice which is given to all students on the social work programme that – in exceptional circumstances – it may not be possible to treat certain disclosures as confidential.

On being contacted by a potential participant, I will send them a consent form (attached). The consent form clarifies that participants may withdraw at any time before, during or

after the interview. To do this they only need to tell me verbally. At that point I would offer to destroy all personal details, and exclude/destroy any references to them in recordings and notes.

### **Methodology**

*Outline the method(s) that will be employed to collect and analyse data.*

The interview will follow a narrative approach, using a list of topics for my guidance (attached). The interviews are expected to take anything from 45 minutes to 2 hours. They will be tape-recorded and transcribed. I will send participants the transcript for comment (and amendment if necessary), and would not use any part which they were unhappy with. I appreciate that there are methodological issues with allowing changes to the transcript but this feels ethically more comfortable, and if this is a planned part of the data collection it can be taken into account in the analysis.

Data will be analysed using the method of critical discursive psychology, which I piloted in my initial study last year.

### **Data Protection**

*Give details of registration of the project under the DP Act and the procedures to be followed re: storage and disposal of data to comply with the Act.*

I have completed a Data Protection Questionnaire and sent this to the University's Data Protection Co-ordinator.

Contact details, correspondence, signed consent forms, tapes, hand-written and transcribed notes will be kept in my locked filing cabinet and will not be seen by anyone other than myself. All other procedures to be followed in accordance with Appendix 1 of the Data Protection Questionnaire. All data will be destroyed once I have completed my Doctorate in Education.

### **Recompense to participants**

*Normally, recompense is only given for expenses and inconvenience, otherwise it might be seen as coercion/inducement to participate. Give details of any recompense to participants.*

The interviews will take place at participants' usual teaching venue/workplace, so no additional expenses will be incurred by them. No recompense will be offered.



## Deception

*Give details of the withholding of any information from participants, or misrepresentation or other deception that is an integral part of the research. Any such deception should be fully justified.*

No details to be withheld or misrepresented.

## Risks

Detail any foreseen risks to participants or researchers and steps that will be taken to minimise/counter these. If the proposed study involves contact with children or other vulnerable groups, please confirm that an enhanced CRB Disclosure has been obtained for each person involved in these contacts.

Normal health and safety procedures would be followed in workplaces or the regional office.

There is a small risk that participants may disclose sensitive information which has not been declared in the process of degree application or GSCC registration. Participants will be advised at the start of the interview that they are not obliged to discuss anything which makes them feel uncomfortable. The information sheet explains that all information will be confidential, but also details the rare circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be maintained.

## Debriefing

*Give details of how information will be given to participants after data collection to inform them of the purpose of their participation and the research more broadly.*

The broad purpose of the research will be shared with participants in advance, and there will be an opportunity for further discussion when the transcripts are shared. After the final contact with the participant I will send them a letter of thanks, with some general feedback on the research to date.

## Declaration

*Declare here that the research will conform to the above protocol and that any significant changes or new issues will be raised with the Ethics Committee before they are implemented. A **Final Report** form will need to be filled in once the research has ended (you will be contacted by XXXX on the date for final report below).*

**Signature(s)**

**Fran Wiles**

(this can be the typed name(s) of investigator(s) if electronic copy is submitted (which is preferred))

**Date**

**27 Feb 2009**

**Brief biographical details of participants**

Lynne	Female	50 - 54	White British
Olanna	Female	45 - 49	Black African
Joanne	Female	40 - 44	White African
Angie	Female	35 - 39	White British
Jak	Male	25 - 29	White British
Pete	Male	25 - 29	White British
Tom	Male	25 - 29	White British

### Interview schedule (with prompts)

*NB. The prompts in boxes are for my use only - participants were given the same sheet without the prompts at the start of the interview*

- *Explanation of the research*
- *Consent form*
- *Confidentiality*
- *Tape recording*
- *Any questions before we start.*

My research is about

- Students' experiences of developing a sense of themselves as a social worker
- Professional identities and personal identities
- Students' experiences of professional registration - ie becoming and remaining registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC)

Topics we might cover (in any order - and it's ok to leave out any which don't apply or that you don't want to discuss)

a) Describe yourself when you are not being a social worker.

b) How you came to be on the social work course.

- *work experience*
- *motivation for wanting to be a social worker*
- *aspirations for the future*

c) An example of experiencing yourself as a 'professional social worker'.

- *What's your image of a 'professional social worker'?*

d) 'Professional identity' ... 'personal identity' ... what these mean for you.

- *Do you think that 'professional identity' is any different from 'personal identity'?*

e) What made you respond to my letter.

f) An example - from your personal or working life, or on your placement - of feeling worried about breaching the bit in the GSCC codes of practice that says you must not 'Behave in a way, in work or outside work, which would call into your suitability to work in social care services' (Code 5.8).

g) An example of feeling you had to 'explain' things about yourself or your past, which other people might see as incompatible with being a social worker.

h) Your registration with the GSCC - did this go smoothly for you? Did it cause you any worries at all?

i) What happened when you sent the University your CRB checks.

j) An example of receiving a complaint about you or your practice.

- *What were your feelings when you knew this was being investigated further?*
- *Did you talk to anyone (friends/ family/ colleagues) about what was happening?*
- *How did you feel about the investigation at the time?*
- *To what extent do you feel this event/ incident is 'behind you' now?*

k) How 'being registered with the GSCC' has affected your journey towards becoming a social worker.

l) Looking back, could the course have prepared you better for the process of GSCC registration?

m) Any other topic which feels relevant to my research (see top of page).

- *Explain next steps – transcript, check have correct contact details.*
- *Follow up interview by phone/ email – to clarify or add to transcript*
- *Any questions?*
- *Thanks*

**Consent form**

**Interviews: Research into social work education and professional registration**

(name of project)

**Agreement to Participate**

I,

(print name)

agree to take part in this research project.

I have had the purposes of the research project explained to me.

I have been informed that I may refuse to participate at any point by simply saying so.

I have been assured that my confidentiality will be protected as specified in the letter/leaflet.

I agree that the information that I provide can be used for educational or research purposes, including publication.

I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact:

Fran Wiles

at:

The University  
[address]

(name of the researcher)

If I wish to speak with someone else about this research, I can contact the Associate Dean (Research) at:

The University  
[address]

I assign the copyright for my contribution to the Faculty for use in education, research and publication.

Signed:

Date:

## Extract from 'Record Your Call' information sheet

RECORDYOURCALL



## FAQ

**How do I record a call?**

Dial 0871 220 7676. When the call is connected, enter the number of the person you want to speak to, followed by Hash.

**Can I record a call to any number?**

You can record a call to most UK landline numbers. Recordmycall does not record calls to: mobiles; international numbers; emergency and other operator services; personal numbers and premium rate services.

**What is the PIN for?**

The PIN is used to identify the recording. When you wish to replay the recording, you will be asked to enter its PIN.

**How do I replay a recording?**

Dial 0871 220 7677 to connect to Recordmycall Replay.

You will hear the following\*:

"Welcome to Recordmycall Replay. Please enter your PIN Code, followed by Hash. To start again, press Star."

Enter the PIN of the recording you wish to replay, followed by Hash. Provided that you have entered the correct PIN, you will hear the following:

"You have <x> new recordings and <y> stored recordings.  
<z> recordings will be deleted within the next 24 hours."

The recording you have selected will then be replayed.

\*(unless your number is "Unavailable")

FAQ

Tel: 0845 200 6000

4

### Interviews: summary of interpretative repertoires and recurring themes

This is an extract from a table I created in order to record recurring themes in the transcripts (indicating potential interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions). I have included this to give some indication of the scope of the data. As you can see, there are about 80 themes here which occurred, in most cases, across four or more transcripts. There is a lot of overlap between them, but it was a useful starting point and alerted me to further areas to be explored.

Social work education as a natural progression from previous work
Social work education as a choice among other options
Social work education as a step up/ career move
Social work education choice was influenced by working with qualified workers
Social work deals with important things in life
Social work is about social justice
OU as an opportunity
Missed opportunities
Seized opportunities (not OU)
OU as financially beneficial
Unqualified worker/ support worker is not respected/ taken notice of by others
Professional = having a certificate
Professional = acting in a professional way in the workplace
Professional = having responsibility
Professional = being accountable
Professional = having knowledge/theory
Professional = having confidence in the workplace
Professional social work identity is being eroded
Professional identity social work has a particular contribution in the multi-agency context
Professional = open minded
Professional = having values
Professional = having authority, legitimacy
Professional = distant, on a pedestal
Learning from a good practice assessor / Influence of practice assessor
Supportive manager/ team
Social work as stressful / managing the stress
Telling/ not telling people you're a social worker

Placing a boundary between personal and professional life (making them separate)
Social work separates you from your friends/family
Merging of personal/professional
My personal beliefs/values accord with professional ones
Social work is more than just a job, it's part of you
GSCC registration is important
GSCC registration supports your professional identity/ status
GSCC registration is about professional reputation – “it doesn't look good”
GSCC registration is about filling in a form/ paying your fees
GSCC registration is potentially controlling
GSCC as all-powerful
Other jobs don't have registration/ a code to adhere to
Suitability is not clear
Being careful about my behaviour
Having had a bit much to drink (having fun) at the weekend might be seen as unsuitable by GSCC
GSCC registration is ok so long as it's 'fair', properly done
GSCC registration is a good thing because it protects vulnerable service users
GSCC registration is about accountability to the public
GSCC registration has NOT been a big influence on my training
GSCC registration has had SOME influence on my training
GSCC registration as an expected part of being a social worker/ student
GSCC role not clearly understood
Disclosure is reasonable/ an obvious requirement (registration discourse)
Complaints - formal v. informal
Criminal justice - 'put in the dock'
Service user has a right to expect a good service
Social workers work for the good of people
Setting a good example
Follow the procedure properly
Reflection and learning from it
Take it on the chin
Social work training has enabled me to explore/ develop my personal/professional values
Job satisfaction/ belief in the job
Study takes up all your time ('before the course etc')



Study/reflection encourages merging of personal with professional (eg writing essays about work, at weekend)
Undermined by age/ childlessness
Overcoming personal stigma/ disadvantage
Troubled identity
Maintaining professional boundaries
Doing my job
I'm still learning/ not qualified yet
Organisational change/ disruption
Outsiders / insiders
Challenging a stereotype (eg African wives are subservient)
Social work education as personal growth
Complaints – represented as ‘misunderstandings’
Professional differences within social work
Perseverance/ determination
Proving yourself
Social work doesn't have a clear professional identity
Social workers (and teachers) are only human
Alcohol and tobacco use are normal
Fixed, stable identity

**Example of interview transcript ('Lynne')<sup>14</sup>**

This interview, like the others, was transcribed almost verbatim. However, as I did not intend to undertake a conversation analysis, there are some sections in the original transcript where I summarised the talk. I left out some of the 'ums' and 'ers', as well as numerous brief interjections of 'mmm' on my part. Finally, in preparing the transcript for this report, I decided to omit the middle sections of the interview (marked [...]) in order to reduce the number of pages, and to preserve confidentiality for people referred to in Lynne's examples. I have also omitted sections of talk that were completely 'off topic' (for instance, relating to interruptions during the interview). It was an informal interview lasting about an hour, with various interruptions due to the time of day; in the notes I made at the time of transcription, I observed 'there was a lot of humour, which I have not been able to convey'.

Two analytic points are worth drawing attention to. First, I did not analyse a series of individual transcripts; as explained in chapter 6, I made thematic selections from each transcript and transferred them into a new document which captured all the extracts across the whole sample. This document then formed the basis for the main analysis. However, this appendix shows how the extracts (cited in the thesis) appear in a single transcript. The second point is that, in this transcript, there are many examples of 'narrative fragments' (Taylor and Littleton, 2006), as well as instances of co-construction between the participant and myself.

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| Fran  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. So, can you tell me a bit about yourself</li> <li>2. You as Lynne when you're</li> <li>3. Not being a social work student</li> </ul>  |
| Lynne | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Divorced mother of two, not teenagers any more</li> <li>5. I don't know what else to say about myself</li> <li>6. I've forgotten what it's like not to be doing this course</li> <li>7. I've sold my soul at the moment, I feel very bogged down with it all</li> </ul> |
| Fran  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. How do you mean?</li> </ul>   |
| Lynne | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. It takes over your life</li> <li>10. This next few months</li> <li>11. I feel I have no life</li> <li>12. I suppose I do</li> <li>13. Going out with friends.</li> <li>14. I can't think of anything else</li> </ul>  |
| Fran  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. Ok</li> <li>16. So divorced, mother of two</li> </ul>  |

---

<sup>14</sup> Pseudonym

- Lynne 17. Skint. Underappreciated. Usual stuff.
- [laughter]
- Fran 18. How did you come to be on social work course?
- Lynne 19. That's quite a long story  
[...]  
20. I started doing [University] stuff by myself  
21. And then I found out the [University] were doing the DipSW [previous qualification]  
22. So I started doing bits of the DipSW  
  
23. Then I applied, didn't get on  
24. I applied twice, didn't get on  
25. So in the meanwhile I've got quite a lot of credits so I carried on  
26. Got my [University] degree  
27. Eventually  
  
28. Then my divorce  
29. Then my divorce happened  
30. So there was a big gap  
31. Um  
32. After all that  
33. Settled  
34. Got my degree and then I sat back and thought what do I do now, I'm bored  
35. After a year  
36. And  
37. I thought I'd have one more shot at  
38. Getting on the [University]  
39. Social work thing  
40. And I had looked at other possibilities  
41. Like occupational therapy  
42. And  
43. Things but  
44. I couldn't really afford to go back to full time study
- Fran 45. Right

- Lynne 46. So I thought have one more shot  
47. And I got on it  
48. And now I'm wondering why  
  
[laughter]
- Fran 49. So that's good  
50. You were really quite determined weren't you  
51. You persevered
- Lynne 52. Yes I persevered  
53. I've certainly got a degree in perseverance, it took me eight years to get my first degree and now it's taken me three to get my second one.  
54. I suppose I was quite fortunate because I could carry some of the courses forward.  
55. So yes, that's how I came to get on it  
  
[Middle section of interview has been omitted]
- Fran 56. So thinking about this question [looking at schedule]  
57. About professional identity and personal identity  
58. We hear a lot about professional identity but  
59. I'm not sure I know what it means  
60. So I thought I'd ask people what the term professional identity  
61. Means to them
- Lynne 62. Yes  
63. I've got no idea!  
[laughter]  
64. Yes as you say  
65. I think that's one thing that social workers  
66. As a profession  
67. Struggles with isn't it  
68. Because everybody knows  
69. If you say you're a nurse  
70. People have some idea what it is  
71. Even though they may have the old uniform and the ward  
72. I mean nursing's not like that these days is it  
73. There's so many different aspects to it

74. But when people say to you 'social worker'
  75. They quite often still don't know
  76. What you mean
  77. My [family] have no idea what it is you know
  78. Unless they think of
  79. You know
  80. The child snatcher type of social worker
  81. Or hippy type of social worker
  82. So I don't know
  83. It's very um
  84. Woolly isn't it really
- Fran
85. Sounds like partly to do with what
  86. Other people think of a social worker
- Lynne
87. Yes, yes
  88. Rather than what we think
  89. No I'm none the wiser really
  90. Well it's so diverse isn't it
  91. That it's very hard to pigeon hole
  92. Um
  93. They try and channel it into NOS<sup>15</sup>s
  94. And all the rest of it
  95. It's not something easily put into a box is it
  96. I know that you can go back to the values being the same
  97. And the underlying
  98. But the actual day to day work
  99. Can be very different

---

<sup>15</sup> National Occupational Standards

100. To do with what client group you're with

[I asked question about whether personal identity is different from professional identity]

Lynne 101. They merge don't they  
102. I suppose when you meet somebody  
103. I suppose one of the first things you say is  
104. What do you do for a job?  
105. So it is part of your identity isn't it  
106. And you may make assumptions as well  
107. If you're told that they're a train robber  
108. Or a double glazing salesman  
109. You do make assumptions don't you  
110. On what they do  
111. So it's part of your identity really  
112. What [you] do  
113. So yeah  
114. I suppose it is  
115. It is part of me

Fran 116. Mmm  
117. Do you go around thinking  
118. I'm a social worker?

[laughter]

Lynne 119. No not really  
120. No  
121. No not that I'm a social worker  
122. I wouldn't put it that way  
123. I suppose I would go round saying  
124. I'm not a sales person  
125. I'm not after big money  
126. I'm not one of these uh  
127. On the treadmill banking type of  
128. You know?  
129. I'm a people person  
130. More than a money orientated or material oriented person

131. I suppose
- Fran 132. So part of the values that you've got, is it?
- Lynne 133. Yeah, yeah
134. I suppose it does boil down to values
- Fran 135. Mmm
136. Ok
- [We look at schedule again, and I move on to the next section]
- Fran 137. I wondered if you had an example that you could give me
138. From your personal or your working life
139. Or on your placement
140. Um
141. That made you feel worried about breaching the
142. GSCC codes of practice
- Lynne 143. Well yes
144. My now ex-partner
145. Who was a social worker
146. Enjoyed cannabis
147. Regularly
148. And you kind of think
149. Well should I really be partaking of it
150. And it was quite strange
151. He also had friends who also liked to smoke
152. They were still social workers
153. And it's a change in attitude really isn't it because
154. They'd been smoking since they were
155. Well
156. Ex-hippies
157. And still carried on
158. And of course in those days I suppose
159. Even though it was frowned on
160. It seems to be deemed worse these days isn't it
161. Now they've changed the legalisation of cannabis
- Fran 162. Yes

Lynne	163.	And I thought maybe I shouldn't be smoking it [laughter]
	164.	But then again you know
	165.	In the comfort of your own home
	166.	It was [she clarifies that this was in the past, not doing anymore] [...]
Fran	167.	Yes, yes
Lynne	168.	You're not actually harming anybody
	169.	But it is an illegal activity
Fran	170.	Mmm
Lynne	171.	So yeah
	172.	I suppose that's one thing I did wonder
Fran	173.	Yes
	174.	Did it cause you any
	175.	Particular worries about that
	176.	You know?
Lynne	177.	No
	178.	No not really
	179.	Just a wonder
	180.	<u>Should</u> I be doing this?
	181.	But I mean
	182.	I didn't do it to any great extent
	183.	Um
Fran	184.	But it's an interesting example
Lynne	185.	I think it's the way
	186.	Attitudes perhaps have changed
	187.	Since this code of conduct has come into force
Fran	188.	Yes
Lynne	189.	And it is quite
	190.	Cannabis is quite



191. Frowned upon you know  
 192. It's not  
 193. It's not the thing to do  
 [...]
   
 Fran 194. It's interesting that things have changed
   
 Lynne 195. I'm sure tobacco will be the same one day
   
 [We talked some more about NHS staff smoking; NMC code; teachers being reprimanded for conduct out of work]
   
 Lynne 196. Yes, I have heard phone ins and things  
 197. About teachers who have been  
 198. Um  
 199. You know  
 200. They've gone out and they've got drunk  
 201. And you kind of think  
 202. Why - they're human.  
 203. I can remember going out and it was someone's leaving do  
 204. With a load of social workers  
 205. And they were  
 206. Really got hammered  
 207. But it's a stressful job and sometimes you need that release don't you
   
 Fran 208. Yeah, yes  
 209. Ok  
 210. Well
   
 [I refer back to what she has said about the GSCC code of practice]
   
 Lynne 211. Yeah, I think it's probably something that you don't  
 212. Think about greatly until you're told to think about it  
 213. Definitely  
 214. I mean you saw these code of conduct leaflets around the office.  
 215. I mean to me a lot of them are just sort of  
 216. Common sensical really  
 217. You know you wouldn't do that  
 218. If you're a decent human being  
 219. And a law abiding citizen  
 220. You don't do those sort of things

221. Um
222. But when it's just a one-off occasion and getting
223. Drunk down your pub and
224. Making a fool of yourself
225. Well then
226. [laughter]
227. We all do that now and again don't we.
- Fran 228. Well that's it
229. It is that kind of
- Lynne 230. Normalising it
- [I asked the question about whether Lynne had an example of 'feeling you had to 'explain' things about yourself or your past, which other people might see as incompatible with being a social worker']
- Lynne 231. Not really
232. No
233. No
234. No I'm afraid I didn't have a wild youth or anything like that
235. Haven't got any skeletons in the cupboard that I've got to own up about
- [laughter]
- [Lynne looks at list of questions]
236. And again with the next question I didn't
237. Have any worries about my registration
- [...]
- Fran [Asked question about whether 'being registered with the GSCC has affected your journey towards becoming a social worker']
- Lynne 238. I don't think it's something you really think about
239. I mean I suppose it is nice that you do have that registration
240. Because I don't know if students were registered before were they?
- Fran 241. No they didn't used to be
- Lynne 242. Yeah I suppose it does back up your professional identity
243. Having that registration
244. But then they're going to

245. Eventually they're going to widen it to all care workers aren't they
246. So whether that will undermine
247. Professional identity of social workers I don't know
- Fran 248. Yes I must admit I hadn't thought of it like that
249. That's true
250. Although I suppose you'd still be a 'registered social worker'
- Lynne 251. But some people
252. Still describe themselves
253. Or describe somebody as
254. A social worker even if they're not
255. That's where it gets a bit
256. A bit woolly
257. You wouldn't say somebody was a nurse if they weren't a nurse
258. But some people still describe themselves as a social worker
259. If they're working in residential care
260. Or they may
261. Somebody may describe them as a social worker
- Fran 262. Yes
263. Maybe that comes back to what you were saying about the professional identity
264. About people not really knowing what a social worker is
265. I mean a nurse, got a uniform
- Lynne 266. Yeah
267. I think sometimes you feel like challenging that
268. 'are you really a social worker'
- Fran 269. I was thinking about this educational link
- Lynne 270. I suppose I still see it as being a different thing being a registered student social worker
271. As being a registered social worker
272. There's still a goal that I've got to get to

[We discuss how and when the results are released, and the length of time it will take to process her application to become registered as a qualified worker]

- Lynne 273. And of course  
 274. I mean everybody  
 275. It's just a horrible thought  
 276. If you don't get through it
- Fran 277. So the question about how being registered affects your journey  
 towards being a social worker,  
 278. It's a bigger thing really  
 279. It's that sort of worry about whether you're going to pass your courses  
 isn't it
- Lynne 280. Yes  
 281. Cos I think the actual  
 282. Registration is quite secondary  
 283. Really  
 284. To qualifying  
 285. There's a difference isn't there  
 286. I'm sure if you came and asked me in January  
 287. What I thought about being registered  
 288. Or about the process  
 289. I'd say 'it should be quicker' [laughter]
- Fran 290. Yes  
 291. People do say it should be quicker  
 292. And about the money  
 293. But you've said it is a positive thing

[Invited Lynne to look back over the questions, and ask if there is anything she wants to add. I sum up some of what we've talked about. We discuss the benefits of sponsorship. I mention I had applied (and failed) to get a place as a trainee social worker when younger. Lynne says that trainee schemes still exist but she couldn't afford to go that route.]

- Lynne 294. I thought about applying  
 295. But I couldn't afford to do it  
 296. You were sponsored but you didn't get your normal salary  
 297. But I thought it does limit people  
 298. They've either got to be young enough that they can still afford to be in  
 debt

299. Or they've got to have supportive partners  
 300. And I hadn't  
 301. I wasn't either
- Fran 302. [Still looking at the schedule] Professional identity/ personal identity  
 303. Any more on that?
- Lynne 304. No  
 305. I think I'll feel  
 306. I will be feeling quite proud of myself  
 307. When I can say I'm a qualified social worker
308. Yes I think  
 309. Others on my course  
 310. Us of the older generation  
 311. Think we should be given  
 312. Extra status  
 313. It's been a struggle but we got there  
 314. We're not these young people who go straight from 18 and do it
- Fran 315. It's a big achievement isn't it
- Lynne 316. Yes  
 317. It will be
- Fran 318. And the profession is getting a lot of very experienced people
- Lynne 319. Yes
- Fran 320. Because you've got not only your degree but all your time before
- [More discussion about GSCC registration]
- Lynne 321. Yes  
 322. When I was registered  
 323. I did look myself up on the website and thought  
 324. Ooh I'm there
- Fran 325. Was that a good feeling to be there?

- Lynne 326. Yes it was
- Fran 327. Is it something that um  
 328. Leading on from that  
 329. Do you think  
 330. That there is any sense in which people  
 331. Feel themselves under scrutiny  
 332. Being registered  
 333. or
- Lynne 334. No  
 335. No  
 336. Because I don't think it's a thing that's widely  
 337. Known really  
 338. I think it's something that people  
 339. You feel a bit under scrutiny the whole time you're doing the course  
 340. When you're on placement  
 341. People looking at you
- [I give a personal example – if I go out for a drink etc I don't want to drive back even if I feel ok ... would not like to risk being stopped by the police]
- Lynne 342. Well I don't go around breaking the law anyway
- Fran 343. No sorry
- Lynne 344. No no I'm just wondering what to say  
 345. I mean you wouldn't
- [Conversation turns to whether she would tell people she is a social worker, if at a social gathering]
346. Would I own up to being a social worker  
 347. But that's a different thing isn't it  
 348. Because we are getting into a bit of a  
 349. Maligned profession at the moment
- Fran [Conversation moves to 'being a student' rather than a qualified social worker]
- Lynne 350. Yes that's one thing about being a student

351. You know when you're mature  
 352. You put yourself down as a student social worker  
 353. Or you introduce yourself as a student social worker  
 354. You almost have to qualify yourself by saying I may be a student but  
 I've been around for a long time  
 355. I've been in the job for a long time  
 356. And you always have to sort of  
 357. Make up  
 358. In a way.  
 359.  
 360. You know if I come to call myself  
 361. A newly qualified social worker<sup>16</sup> it's going to be very strange because  
 362. In some respects I will be  
 363. But in other respects I'm not newly qualified  
 364. I wish there was some other term they could think of  
 365. 'Newly qualified but with lots of experience' social worker  
 366. You know  
 367. It's going to be very strange to be called newly qualified

[I clarify that this is the new 'year's probation' thing]

- Lynne 368. Which is good  
 369. But it's still seems quite strange that  
 370. I'm going to be sort of classified as the same as sort of a 22 year old  
 371. They would be newly qualified

372. Hopefully after a year or two that label will sort of

- Lynne 373. Well yes, it will go, it will go  
 374. But it's going to be quite strange.

[Conversation returns to 'personal/professional']

- Lynne 375. I think when it comes down to this personal/ professional identity thing  
 376. I think you have to have more boundaries really  
 377. When it comes to sort of  
 378. You know if you're a nurse  
 379. And somebody

---

<sup>16</sup> This status, now used in the first year after qualifying, had recently been announced.

380. Out in the street has a heart attack  
 381. You'd do something  
 382. But if you're a social worker and you see somebody begging on the side of the street  
 383. You walk by
- Fran 384. Yes
- Lynne 385. Because you can't get involved with that can you  
 386. It's a different sort of boundary there  
 387. I don't know if it's because you're a little bit more cynical  
 388. You think  
 389. I think there was one in [town] the subway  
 390. And I looked at him and I thought  
 391. No he's got that heroin type of colouring you know  
 392. And you kind of think  
 393. Beyond
- Fran 394. Is it also to do with what you were saying earlier  
 395. About the profession being very broad  
 396. You'd be stopping every five minutes because there's potential situations all around you
- Lynne 397. If I was to meet anybody new  
 398. Or make friends with anybody  
 399. And they had mental health problems  
 400. I wouldn't want to know  
 401. It sounds horrible  
 402. It sounds very judgmental  
 403. But it's not something I want in my private life
- Fran 404. So it's like having to have the boundary isn't it
- Lynne 405. I think it's something you learn
- [The conversation turns to living in the same neighbourhood as people who are clients of one's own social work team]
- Lynne 406. It's very difficult



407. A young social worker in the office today  
 408. She's thinking of buying a flat  
 409. And she was going 'what's the area like'  
 410. Cos obviously she doesn't want to be living next door to a client  
 411. And I kind of thought  
 412. Well why not  
 413. Live next door to a client?  
 414. It's quite judgemental  
 415. To think you can't live next door  
 416. And I can understand that  
 417. At weekends you don't want to go out and  
 418. Don't want to be annoyed by clients  
 419. But then you just say to them  
 420. You know  
 421. Sorry it's my weekend  
 422. I'll see you on Monday or phone you on Monday or whatever  
 423. It's something you've got to learn  
 424. And she was getting quite anxious about  
 425. You know  
 426. Where to live
- Fran 427. I mean maybe that's something you've learned through your experience  
 for a long time
- Lynne 428. Yes  
 429. And I think well if people want to find you  
 430. They will find you  
 431. Wherever you live [laughter]
- [General chatting]
- Fran 432. I think we've finished. I'm going to turn it off now.